RULERS & ELITES • VOLUME 11

NARRATIVES OF KINGSHIP IN EURASIAN EMPIRES, 1300–1800

RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN

BRILL

Narratives of Kingship in Eurasian Empires, 1300–1800

Rulers & Elites

Series Editor

Jeroen Duindam (*Leiden University*)

Editorial Board

Maaike van Berkel (*Radboud University Nijmegen*)
Yingcong Dai (*William Paterson University*)
Jean-Pascal Daloz (*University of Strasbourg*)
Jos Gommans (*Leiden University*)
Jérôme Kerlouégan (*University of Oxford*)
Dariusz Kolodziejczyk (*Warsaw University*)
Metin Kunt (*Sabanci University*)

VOLUME 11

The titles published in this series are listed at *brill.com/rule*

Narratives of Kingship in Eurasian Empires, 1300–1800

By

Richard van Leeuwen

BRILL

LEIDEN | BOSTON

BRILL OPEN

This is an open access title distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License, which permits any non-commercial use, and distribution, provided no alterations are made and the original author(s) and source are credited.

Cover illustration: Jahangir preferring a Sufi shaikh to kings from the St. Petersburg Album, by Bichitr, 1615–1618. Courtesy of the Freer Gallery of Art and Arthur M. Sackler Gallery, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C.: Purchase – Charles Lang Freer Endowment, F1942.15a.

The Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data is available online at http://catalog.loc.gov
LC record available at http://lccn.loc.gov/2017028405

Typeface for the Latin, Greek, and Cyrillic scripts: "Brill". See and download: brill.com/brill-typeface.

ISSN 2211-4610
ISBN 978-90-04-34053-4 (hardcover)
ISBN 978-90-04-34054-1 (e-book)

Copyright 2017 by Richard van Leeuwen.
This work is published by Koninklijke Brill NV. Koninklijke Brill NV incorporates the imprints Brill, Brill Hes & De Graaf, Brill Nijhoff, Brill Rodopi and Hotei Publishing.
Koninklijke Brill NV reserves the right to protect the publication against unauthorized use and to authorize dissemination by means of offprints, legitimate photocopies, microform editions, reprints, translations, and secondary information sources, such as abstracting and indexing services including databases. Requests for commercial re-use, use of parts of the publication, and/or translations must be addressed to Koninklijke Brill NV.

This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

Contents

Acknowledgements VII
List of Figures VIII

Introduction 1
The *Thousand and One Nights* and Processes of Transmission 6
Source Material 11

1 **Kings, Viziers, Concubines** 24
The Cycle of the 'Seven Viziers'/'Seven Sages of Rome' and Its Cognates 25
Variations: The Story of 'Jali'ad of Hind and His Vizier Shimas' 34
King Wu's Expedition against Zhou and *Proclaiming Harmony* 38
Concluding Remarks 48

2 **Gods, Demons, and Kings** 52
The Prince and the Demons of Evil: The Legendary Vikramaditya 53
The Thirty-Two Steps of the Throne 54
Harun al-Rashid, Vizier Ja'far, and the Jinns 61
Harun al-Rashid and the Discourse of Power 68
Fighting the Evil Spirit: *Creation of the Gods* 71
Concluding Remarks 76

3 **Divine Insights, Cosmic Harmony** 78
The Cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents' 79
King and Cosmos: *The Sorcerer's Revolt* 88
Jan Potocki's *Manuscrit Trouvé à Saragosse* 98
Concluding Remarks 107

4 **The Knight and the King** 109
Tirant lo Blanc: The Ideal Knight 113
The Harbinger of the Faith: Amir Hamza 121
The Emperor and the Barbarians: The Exploits of Yue Fei 133
Hang Tuah, the Malay Hero 141
The 'Foreign' Sultan: Al-Zahir Baybars 147
The Muslims against the Byzantines: Sayyid Battal 155
Concluding Remarks 159

5 Kingship and Love 163
The Prince and the Mysteries of Love 167
The Enchantment of Love: European Fantasies of Kingship and Love 182
Concluding Remarks 196

6 Unrequested Advice 198
The Frustrated Official: Mustafa Ali of Gallipoli 201
Against the Old Order: Huang Zongxi and Hung Sheng 210
European and Oriental Despots: Montesquieu and Diderot 215
A Modern Mirror-for-Princes: Christoph Martin Wieland's *Der Goldene Spiegel* 232
The Official and His Empress: Alexander Radischev and Catherine II 239
Concluding Remarks 250

Conclusion 253

Bibliography 261
Index 268

Acknowledgements

The research for this book was part of the research programme 'Eurasian Empires' funded by the Dutch research organization N.W.O. and conducted at Leiden University, the University of Amsterdam and Radboud University Nijmegen. I am grateful to the directors of the programme, Jeroen Duindam, Peter Rietbergen, Jos Gommans and Maaike van Berkel for inviting me to join the research team and providing me with the opportunity to delve into a fascinating and important field of study. Together with the PhD and Post-Doc students Barend Noordam, Lennart Bes, Willem Flinterman, Kim Ragetli, Liesbeth Geevers, Hans Voeten, and Cumhur Bekar they created a stimulating and agreeable scholarly environment, ensuring a critical and inspiring exchange of ideas. My special thanks go to all participants for their questions and comments on the text presented here; to Barend Noordam for helping me with the transliteration of Chinese names; to Kate Delaney for copy-editing the text; to David Claszen for finalizing the format and compiling the index; and to Joost van Schendel for helping to find and select the illustrations. Needless to say, all remaining deficiencies and mistakes are entirely my own.

The research overlapped with my contribution to the programme 'Early modern encounters with the Orient', financed by HERA and directed by Charles Burnett (University of London) and Jan Loop (University of Kent). They kindly provided the funding for the online publication of the text.

List of Figures

1 Prince and astrologers, ascribed to Basavana. India, Mughal dynasty, circa 1585–1590, Musée des arts asiatiques-Guimet, Paris EO 3577 A. 18

2 Mounted official, by Zhao Mengfu. Dated 1296, Palace Museum, Beijing. 44

3 Chinese pantheon, from Athanasius Kircher, *China monumentis* (Amsterdam, 1667). 66

4 Emissaries bring news from the provinces of Khaybar and Chin to Anusherwan, from the *Hamzanama*, 16th century, by Mir Sayyid Ali. Courtesy of the MAK—Austrian Museum of Applied Arts / Contemporary Arts, BI 8770–8772. Photograph: MAK/Georg Mayer. 92

5 Yue Fei's mother tattooing Yue Fei, 18th century painting from the Long Corridor at the Beijing Summer Palace. Photo courtesy of Wikipedia, Shizhao. 114

6 Diderot and Catherine II, 19th century engraving by Alphonse Marie de Neuville, from François Guizot, *A Popular History of France from the Earliest Times*. Volume 6, 321. 139

7 Sultan Bayazid before Timur, folio from an *Akbarnama* (History of Akbar). Painting by Dharam Das, ca. 1600. Courtesy of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1935. 157

8 Emperor Huizong, *Listening to the Qin*, by Zhao Ji. Ca. 11th century, Palace Museum Beijing. 175

9 The Emperor of China ploughing the first furrow, by Christian Bernhardt Rode, ca. 1773. Courtesy of Gemäldegalerie, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin, Preußischer Kulturbesitz, photo: Jörg P. Anders. 202

10 Portuguese map of Malacca, from Manuel de Faria e Sousa, *Asia Portuguesa*. Volume 1 (Lisbon, 1666) 148. 226

Introduction

In general, the study of history can be meaningful only if embedded in well-defined frameworks. These frameworks can, for instance, be temporal, geographical/spatial, disciplinary, or discursive. If the scope of the framework is widened, the field of research will automatically split up to become a cluster of subordinated histories, which interact and coalesce around specific centres, boundaries, periods, and source-types. These divisions and the representation of history as consisting of various components become inevitable for the construction of a meaningful historical narrative, which conveys the idea that the course of history can be comprehended and interpreted. It is the only way in which history can be useful as the basis of a worldview, a view of the present and a sense of the future. Still, the nature and rationale of the division into components and the differentiating boundaries, as they are defined within disciplinary paradigms, can and will be questioned, challenged, and revised in order to find new and illuminating interactions and coherences.

This book emerged in the context of a research programme aimed at transcending well-entrenched disciplinary demarcations and matrices of analyses of historical processes. The programme, 'Eurasian empires. Integration processes and identity formation, 1300–1800', was set up to examine developments in a historical field that is, both temporally and spatially, vast and to identify parallels hitherto largely obscured by all kinds of disciplinary and thematic boundaries.[1] Evidently, such a broad approach presents many theoretical and methodological challenges, drawing researchers out of their comfort zones and forcing them to see their material in a new light. This process may be highly rewarding, of course, when new connections and relationships are revealed, but the results may be confined to tentative and speculative conclusions, since the research has departed from familiar interpretive frameworks. The more historical research is stretched over time and space, the more difficult it is to construct a coherent framework in which connections and parallels become meaningful and convincing.

These remarks are perhaps even more relevant for research into the history of culture and literature. Although developments within these fields are obviously linked to the historical processes in which they are embedded, they are

1 The programme was a cooperative project between Leiden University, the University of Amsterdam, and Radboud University, Nijmegen, and funded by research organization NWO (2011–2016).

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_002
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

not completely congruent with these processes and seem to have a dynamic of their own. Whereas political, economic, and social history are as a rule visibly linked to events, cultural history is more diffuse and less easily delimited into neatly traceable entities. To give an example, languages are a major factor in both cultural and political history, but the way in which they operate within these fields is not necessarily complementary or congruent. And, political boundaries may coincide with linguistic boundaries, but the impact of these boundaries on politics can be fundamentally different from their impact on cultural dynamics. Moreover, this impact may be completely different in various historical periods and places, for instance in the contexts of premodern Asian empires or of the modern nation-states.

Apart from the difficulties generated by the incongruence of historical segments, the study of cultural history also differs from other fields because it is dependent on other kinds of sources. Whereas political and economic history, and to some extent social history, are recorded in reports, chronicles, letters, legal documents, official decrees, personal accounts, bureaucratic files etc., on the basis of which developments can be constructed on a more or less factual level, cultural history can often only be traced in the space between these forms of historical evidence, in the aesthetic expressions of worldviews, in the broadest sense, manifested not only in art, literature, religion, and philosophy, but also in forms of social relationships in daily life and in ceremonies, rituals, and customs. There is enough evidence in history to show that these elements develop in a different rhythm than political history and that cultural systems can endure and outlive many changes of the political regime. Moreover, cultural systems seem to be more fluid than systems of political power, since they tend to transcend political boundaries and radiate within different layers of exchange between societies.

Although cultural and political histories are thus not congruent, this does not mean that they are completely independent from each other. Cultural identification is a strong incentive to form political entities, and cultural expressions—art, literature, religion—often coalesce around centres of political and economic power. Therefore, even if culture develops and spreads at a different pace and along different channels, the flows of interaction are steered and co-shaped by political entities and the distribution of political and economic power. This means that political history is an important framework for the study of cultural history, as long as one keeps in mind that it constitutes only a part of this framework, together with, for example, linguistic history. Political history can sometimes explain the emergence and proliferation of cultural trends, and the effectuation of cultural influence, but at other times it can only reveal these trends, because it wants to identify with them and promote

them within processes of power formation. Besides, sometimes cultural trends and influences are found that do not fit into the demarcations and interactions revealed by political or economic history, thus showing how they are bound to distinctive trajectories. This implies that frameworks for the construction of cultural history are often much more difficult to define.

These methodological complications should not, we think, prevent the researcher from exploring fields and domains that transcend the familiar demarcations, even if this means that the result is that he or she can only tentatively outline potential new connections and frameworks. In the present study, it is our intention to use the framework of 'Eurasian empires' in the period 1300–1800 to examine possible parallels in discourses of power and kingship in what may be called the premodern period, focusing especially on several kinds of narrative texts. It is our aim, first, to analyse representations of kingship and the power structures supporting it in fictional texts from the various areas constituting the 'imperial' phase in Eurasian history; and, second, to draw attention to parallels within the discourses reflected in these texts and tentatively discern relationships, influences, and patterns of transmission. We will try to identify resemblances and differences and attempt to design preliminary outlines of possible connections.

The rationale behind this undertaking is the acknowledgement that discourses of kingship and power are not only shaped by official regulations, doctrines, and ideological treatises. Kingship may be 'formalized' by political institutions, law, decrees, and official foundations of sovereignty, but it has also what may be called an 'aesthetic' component, which consists of the cultural forms in which this official power is moulded. This aesthetic component becomes manifest in multiform expressions of royal power, ranging from the king's attire to parades and ceremonies; from the regalia of the royal tradition to the architecture of palaces; from the attendance of the king at religious rituals to the performance of various kinds of secular rituals. All these elements not only buttress the status of the king as the legitimate ruler, they also establish a connection between the formal prerogatives of power and the subjects. They contribute to the integration of the power of the sovereign into the popular imagination, fostering the acceptance of the king's claims to legitimacy. It is argued here that some types of literary works are part of this aesthetic, cultural realm, helping to integrate forms of power in society and thereby not only strengthening formations of power, but also transforming them into accepted forms of 'authority'.

A project of this kind is problematic not only for the reasons mentioned above, including the general difficulty of disrupting existing frameworks. There are other problems, too, such as, first, the enormous number of texts that

could be used as source material. From this corpus a selection should be made, which can never claim to be representative, because, as said above, there is no framework to determine the common features it should represent; second, even after a rigorous selection of the material, it should be recognized that there is still no reliable reconstruction possible of the textual history of the works involved. Some texts have been popular for ages and exist in various versions, but we lack frameworks to determine how these versions are related to each other and how they fit into the development of the work over time; third, and related to this, the lack of a consistent philological framework makes it difficult to link texts to the historical processes in which they evolved, and, consequently, to see how trends and resemblances were connected historically. It is in most cases impossible to prove influences between texts and to define trajectories of transmission.

To counter these obstacles we have adapted our procedures to our limited possibilities. First, as for the selection of texts, we were constrained, obviously, by linguistic capabilities, so the choice was necessarily confined to works and translations in English, French, German, and Arabic. Furthermore, since it is impossible to be a specialist in all the literatures involved, ranging from Spanish and English to Russian, Hindi, Chinese, Persian, Malay, Turkish, and Arabic, we had to make a selection out of the best-known works, without being able to tread outside the paths of the established literary canon. Second, since only a limited segment of the literatures involved is directly focused on kingship, texts have been chosen, too, which are indirectly concerned with questions of power, authority, and rulership, but which nevertheless serve as a component of discourses of authority. The genres that have been selected are works of the mirror-for-princes type, containing a predominantly fictional element; chivalric works of various types; love romances and narratives revealing the esoteric dimension of rulership; and satirical-critical works typical of periods of enlightenment. We will discuss these types more elaborately below.

Third, in our discussion of the texts we will confine ourselves mainly to a narratological analysis to determine the generic characteristics, the nexus of form and content, the requirements of generic conventions, the dramatic component, the intrigue(s), the representation of power, etc. Only in some cases will we expand our discussion to include the connections between the narrative and its direct historical environment. This is because often we are unable to situate a work more or less accurately within history and because works remained popular through the centuries, implying that they were perhaps not detached from the historical context, but still conveyed concepts that withstood the impact of historical transformations. And although literary works of this kind, especially romances of chivalry and love, should have been rel-

evant to specific periods and circumstances—and in fact owe their survival to them—it was probably one of their functions to record and preserve certain concepts within a cultural/political tradition. For this reason we think it is justified to analyse these elements in an ahistorical way, as long as it is admitted that they were part of history, too.

Fourth, in order to bring some coherence to the presentation of the analyses and its results, we have used a particular work as a kind of integrating matrix, and that work is the Arabic story collection *Alf Layla wa-layla*, or the *Thousand and one nights*. This work is chosen not because it is a repository from which other stories derived, as is often thought, nor because it is a stable text within the complex trajectory of transmission, but rather because of the opposite: The *Thousand and one nights* as it has evolved in history illustrates the complexity of the process of transmission and the inherent fluidity of narrative texts. It has developed over time into a reservoir containing material from various sources, which was eventually incorporated into its 'late' versions. Especially in the eighteenth century it became a cauldron of material from Asia and the Middle East, including Ottoman Turkey, but also a hub from whence this material migrated to Europe. It thus became one of the focal points and epicentres of the proliferation of narrative material from the fifteenth century onwards, not only preserving older material, but also instigating its adaptation and reworking it to accommodate it to new environments.

The *Thousand and one nights*, in its remarkable diversity, not only contains 'prototypes' of various genres, emphasizing their relevance over time, it also represents a primordial type of the literary imagination. It can be argued that the work itself, especially its well-known framing story about Shahrazad and Shahriyar, is an adaptation of the narrative concept of the mirror-for-princes.[2] It shows how the cycle came into being through a confrontation between Shahriyar, a powerful king, and womankind, a motif that recurs in many works of the mirror-for-princes type. Thus, it not only contains various types of narratives about power and kingship; it also itself represents a narrative of power and kingship, and as such, as we will see below, it has inspired authors to reflect on the subject and to integrate Eastern and Western discourses. Because of this integrative role and the exemplary nature of its textual history, we will refer to the *Thousand and one nights* throughout the text. It is helpful, therefore, to briefly sketch the trajectory of this significant work.

2 See Richard van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation* (London and New York, 2007).

The *Thousand and One Nights* and Processes of Transmission

From the beginning of the eighteenth century onwards, the *Thousand and one nights* has without doubt been the most widely known work of 'Oriental' literature. It acquired such fame in the course of two centuries that it not only became an iconic representation of Oriental storytelling, but also was gradually obscured by its own myth. The work was seen as a truthful representation of Oriental culture, of Oriental society, and even of the Oriental mind. In the realm of literature it came to be held as an ancient repository of stories from which all stories derived. In the meantime, texts emerged containing various versions whose provenance was not always clear and that contributed to the formation of a growing cluster of texts that were all in some way or another connected to the 'idea' of the *Nights*, rather than to an unambiguous philologically established corpus. This process of expansion and mystification was fostered by the various European translations that appeared, especially, in the nineteenth century. Thus, it seems that the more popular the work became, the more it was hidden under layers of new versions and conflicting claims to authenticity.[3]

In order to obtain a more truthful picture of the nature of the *Thousand and one nights* as a literary work, it has to be situated in history and stripped of its many outgrowths and metamorphoses. Not only should we take care to discern different layers within the corpus; we should at the same time accept that the work is not immutable and is part of processes of transmission and development that may have changed it over the course of time. Unfortunately, our knowledge of the textual history of the *Nights* is still far from complete. The manuscripts and references that we have provide only pieces of the puzzle and leave many blind spots, and although we know that the early versions were related to the wider context of Sanskrit and Persian literature, the nature of these connections and the paths of transmission are still to a large extent unclear. It also remains to be clarified how these early traces of the *Nights* relate to the later phases of its development and how we should evaluate the significance of the emergence of the European *'Nights* tradition' in the eighteenth century.

So what do we know about the textual history of the *Thousand and one nights*? As far as the Arabic tradition is concerned, the oldest trace of a man-

3 For a history of the text and translations of the *Thousand and One Nights*, and for further references, see: Ulrich Marzolph and Richard van Leeuwen, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2004).

uscript of a work with the title *Thousand and one nights*, and mentioning Shahrazad, that we have dates probably back to the ninth century, and in Arabic literary works we find references to a work titled the *Thousand and one nights*, or *Thousand nights*, in the tenth and eleventh centuries. The oldest manuscript that contains a substantial text is traced back to the first half of the fifteenth century. This version consists of 282 nights, and it is still unclear how it is related to the previous references to the *Nights*. This version, which shows the traces of a Mamluk milieu, remained the core of later manuscript versions made in the eighteenth century, both in Europe, by Arab immigrants, and in the Arab world. In the latter versions, this core was supplemented with stories from various sources, pertaining either to the corpus of canonical Arabic literature (*adab*) and to the reservoir of popular or oral storytelling. Thus, the Arabic tradition can be divided into an early phase, culminating in the fifteenth-century manuscript, which may either be a reworking of earlier versions or an autonomous collection under the title *Thousand and one nights*; and a later phase, in which material from other sources was incorporated.

The different Arabic versions of the *Thousand and one nights* and some of the references in the Arabic tradition strongly suggest links with Sanskrit and Persian predecessors. First, the peculiar form of the collection—a framing story with embedded tales—and the theme of the framing story—postponement related to adultery—can be found in Sanskrit texts, too, a connection that is confirmed by several motifs in the framing story that are clearly taken from Sanskrit examples. Apart from these formal elements, the evidence from the librarian Ibn al-Nadim (eleventh century), who compiled a list of current books, indicates that the *Nights*, in one form or another, may be derived from a Persian text called *Hazar afsane*, or 'Thousand nights', which presumably was translated into Arabic in the ninth or tenth century. This may explain why so many names in the collection are of Persian origin. However, Ibn al-Nadim's statements about the work and his other reference to an Arabic text titled *Thousand nights* are insufficient to establish a direct trajectory from Sanskrit examples through a Persian intermediate link and an early Arabic version to the fifteenth-century manuscript. The evidence clearly outlines a broader literary context and prehistory of the work, but unequivocal proof is still lacking.

Whatever may have been the case, the fifteenth-century manuscript surfaced in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. It was translated into French by the orientalist Antoine Galland (1646–1715) and—since it contained only 282 nights—it was supplemented with material from other sources. These sources were, first, separate manuscripts with similar stories preserved in the Bibliothèque Royale (notably the cycle of Sindbad); second, stories transmitted to him orally by the Syrian traveller Hanna Diyab (the stories of 'Aladdin'

and 'Ali Baba' among others); and, third, stories from a Turkish collection translated by Galland's colleague François Pétis de la Croix (1653–1713). The result, which was published in twelve volumes between 1704 and 1717, was thus a hybrid collection, which only partly reflected an original work. It was nevertheless received with enthusiasm in France and beyond, and it became the starting point for the enduring European tradition of the *Thousand and one nights* with its many translations, pastiches, adaptations, and 'continuations', and of the incorporation of Oriental images and literary models into European culture. It can be argued that the multifaceted impact of this work was not hampered by its hybridity but rather fostered by it.

The eighteenth century witnessed not only the European encounter with the *Thousand and one nights* but also a revival of the work in the Arabic literary tradition. In France, two manuscript versions were compiled by two Arab migrant scholars living in Paris, using Galland's core manuscript as a basis. These versions are usually denounced as forgeries, but closer inspection shows their resemblance, both in procedure and in contents, with manuscript versions produced in Egypt later in the century. These latter manuscripts contain the usual core and supplemental material, but it remains unclear whether they reflect an effort to restore a previous version of the collection, as far as it was remembered at the time, or should be seen as just a haphazard *bricolage* of narrative material. Another possibility is that the collection was at the time not seen as a specific work, but that, rather, the title was used as an 'umbrella' to bring stories of various kinds together in one manuscript, a method that was not unusual at the time. Whatever may have been the case, the Egyptian manuscripts of the end of the eighteenth century were printed in the so-called Bulaq-editon of 1835 and became the standard version of the 'modern' tradition of the *Thousand and one nights*.

It is tempting to link the revival of the Arabic tradition of the *Nights* with the popularity of the work in Europe. After all, after the success of Galland's *Mille et une nuits* Oriental scholars went in search of *Thousand and one nights* manuscripts in Egypt and Syria, and thus the market for copyists significantly increased. It is known that at least some of the manuscripts ended up in the hands of European scholars and diplomats. However, this link is not totally self-evident, and it may be more rewarding to see the revitalization of the *Nights* not within relations between Europe and the Arab world but rather within those between the Arab world and the Ottoman context. It does not seem far-fetched to assume that the Ottoman conquest of the Arab lands in the sixteenth century and the consolidation of the Turkish administration in the subsequent period gave rise to a new historical and cultural framework, which created new patterns and opportunities for literature. The Ottomans were eager

to inventory, collect, and translate the cultural and scholarly heritage of the newly conquered provinces, and they, conversely, brought the literati of these provinces in touch with their own Turkish-Asian background. It would seem that this created a fertile ground for literary exchange.

In his book on the historical references in the stories of the *Thousand and one nights*, Jean-Claude Garcin attempts to re-evaluate the later Arabic versions of the *Nights* and to locate them in their historical context. Some of his conclusions may be too speculative, but he has drawn our attention to two important aspects: first the possibility of the transfer of narrative material from Asia to the Middle East after the Timurid invasions (after app. 1400); and, second, the possibility that some of the material may not be ancient Arabic narratives, but rather originated in the Ottoman context in the fifteenth/sixteenth centuries (for example the story of 'Umar al-Nu 'man'). Although there is not sufficient evidence to prove that the fifteenth-century version of the *Nights* as we know it, which became the core of later versions, was an original literary work written by an author who adopted examples from Central Asia, it would still seem logical to assume that the later phase of the *Nights* tradition would reveal traces of the new historical and cultural interactions of the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries.[4]

Although we would need much more evidence in the form of manuscripts before we can reconstruct a new embedding of the *Thousand and one nights* within the trajectories of transmission of Central Asian, Persian, and Turkish narrative material, we have some leads for further speculation. First, it is not improbable that the emergence of chivalric literature in Mamluk times was related to commercial contacts between Egypt and Asia; second, we know that from the fifteenth century onwards works were translated from Arabic and Persian into Turkish; third, the Mamluk and Ottoman rise to power in the Levant, with their Turkish/Asian background, facilitated the exchange of narrative material from various cultural domains. It is significant that a Turkish translation of the *Thousand and one nights* was made in 1636 and that several stories that were incorporated in the eighteenth-century versions of the *Nights* were known in Turkish in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries. This may indicate that this supplemental material was selected from narratives circulating in the Ottoman empire at the time; third, in this way the Ottoman context not only gave an impetus to what may be called a cultural 'renaissance' or a cultural 'modernization'; it also opened channels for cultural interaction and transla-

4 Jean-Claude Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique des 'Mille et une nuits': Essai sur l'édition de Būlāq, 1835* (Arles and Paris, 2013).

tion; and, finally, it would seem that the eighteenth century was an important period not only for its interest in narrative texts, but also in its preoccupations with recording them in manuscripts. Especially in Egypt, but also in India, we see that important texts were laid down in (adapted?) manuscript versions at that time.

After developing these rather speculative views, it becomes clearer how the *Thousand and one nights* can be used for the present study. First, the textual history of the *Nights* covers a huge area and a broad span of time, linking ancient India with pre-modern Europe, with medieval Persia and the Arab/Ottoman Middle East as formative centres. Second, the *Nights* is a cycle in which old and less old material has blended. It definitely contains ancient stories and stories from popular and oral circuits that have survived through the ages. It seems, however, that this ancient material continued to circulate and was therefore still relevant enough to be incorporated into the later compilations. Thus, the *Thousand and one nights* can serve as an example of a corpus of literature that reflects tastes and mentalities of several periods. Third, the diversity of the material allows us to locate it in the framework of historical processes, while at the same time acknowledging the persistence of literary trends, concepts, and themes. It thus seems to comply with one of the primary functions of literature, anchoring specific concepts and themes in textual genres and preserving them within a tradition, and presenting them in a form and context relevant for changing historical contexts.

Fourth, the work can be seen as a narrative space where several literary traditions converged. It is an Arabic text that contains the traces of a Sanskrit and Persian prehistory and that provided a literary form that enabled it to, once again, integrate material from new Persian and Turkish environments. Apart from functioning as a repository attracting material from all directions and clustering it into a formal whole, it also functioned as a vehicle for these stories, making them known to other environments, most notably Western Europe. It was not only a passive receptacle, but also an active proliferating force for literary material. Fifth, by performing these functions, the work lays bare the workings of processes of transmission, which are complex and fluid, and related to historical change but still resistant to change, and which have a structuring function while being subject to diffuse forces. Most significantly, the example of the *Thousand and one nights* shows one of the paradoxes of processes of literary transmission: a work that brings to light a treasure trove of material circulating within the tradition, enabling it to be preserved and re-circulated in new forms and new environments, while at the same time distorting and obscuring its own history. As a literary point of gravitation, the *Thousand and one nights* has attracted considerable attention, acquiring

an almost mythical status, deviating the eye from its complex history and its situatedness in historical processes. Works such as the *Nights* both steer and regulate processes of transmission and eclipse underlying currents.

Sixth, as said above, all these dynamics are accumulated in a work whose form and thematic and generic purport reflect an age-old literary procedure, which is the function of storytelling as an 'antidote' against the vicissitudes of time, violence, and death. As we will see, this theme, related to the authority of the king, is a literary archetype that has withstood the ages and that has transcended all cultural boundaries. But it is an archetype with a certain twist, because while mimicking the form of the mirror-for-princes, it at the same time seems to mitigate the main concerns of the genre. It is thus to some extent subversive, parodying and challenging the official claims to power and relativizing the potential of despotism. It is these characteristics that make it particularly apt as a model for our discussion below, exemplifying generic types, narrative strategies, and processes of transmission.

Source Material

Formations of power, in the broadest sense, ranging from institutions to functional or individual prerogatives, are primarily anchored in official texts and documents. Power is legitimated by legal codices, formal acknowledgements, official histories, and principles of administration. It is embedded in institutions with a formalized status, in agreements and decrees, in hierarchies of functions and capacities, in executive bodies and councils. Nevertheless, it is ultimately based on the ability and privilege to use force, to impose measures, to control society, and to preserve the monopoly of the ruler. Evidently, the corpus of texts and documents in which the legitimation of power was organized differed in various societies and historical periods, ranging from corpuses of legal texts to books explaining the responsibilities of the ruler and his counsellors, or decrees regulating the relationship between the nobility and the king. The nature and size of this kind of corpus will vary: in ancient and medieval times it was to a large extent replaced by customary practice and tradition, while in more formally regulated societies these texts and documents formed the top layer of a large administrative bureaucracy.

The corpus of official texts supporting formations of power reveals only a part of the actual discourse and mechanisms of power. It is usually restricted to an elite, a circle surrounding the centre of power where the relations between powerful groups are balanced. Although it may legitimize power configurations, they spring from a spirit of rationality and organization, which aims to

impose a certain structure on society in which the division of power is formalized and consolidated. It reflects the way in which the ruler/government defines itself and in which it envisages its position vis-à-vis society, and as such is to some extent isolated from society as a whole. It is merely a reflection of the *modus vivendi* among the potential contestants for power, which is perhaps capable of enforcing a certain constellation of power but not of integrating it into the social imagination. For a power apparatus to work smoothly it not only requires formal endorsement by a legal system or official decrees; it also requires a cultural component that shapes its logic into acceptance and transforms an inherently enforced situation into the harmony of normality.

The cultural components of power constellations are, of course, varied and not always clearly defined. They reside in all kinds of discursive fields and forms, from religious and philosophical texts to popular songs and historical texts in which rulers are glorified. They are found in all kinds of customs and ceremonies, in which the symbols of power are displayed and celebrated, from enthronement and burials to royal visits, royal feasts, royal proclamations, and public events. They are related to religion and clerical feasts and rituals in which power is consecrated as belonging to the celestial order and in which the bonds between political and religious legitimacy are confirmed. They find expression in holidays, popular feasts, seasonal festivities, and marriage customs, but also in the relationships between the ruler and the fine arts, science, fashion, and architecture. In short, they manifest themselves in all social mechanisms that harmonize the claims of political power with an existing cultural order; they are meant to transform the rational basis of power into a coherent set of symbols that not only appeals to the collective imagination, but also fits in the symbolic system supported by traditional and cultural identity.

Among the prominent media conveying the symbols of power is, of course, literature, in its various forms and genres. Literature, and especially fictional literature, is not only a medium for the elite to construct images of itself, but also a discursive means for the populace to express its attitude towards the traditional, historical, and contemporary articulations of power. It contains and perpetuates certain symbols and concepts, and integrates these into broader visions of life and society. It conveys images of the past and the present that reveal tensions but also continuities and the historical roots of claims to power. It is the aim of this study, as a sub-project in the Eurasian empires programme, to examine the ways in which formations of power, and especially kingship, have left traces in the fictional literatures of the societies involved, especially China, India, Russia, Persia, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe. The intention is primarily to supplement the official discourses of power with impressions from more subaltern discourses recorded in a corpus of texts of a different

genre. A study such as this may provide insight into the ways in which claims to power were integrated into culture and thereby into the collective imagination, facilitating the functioning of government and the effectuation of power in society.

The aim of the sub-project implies a selection of sources favouring texts that do not primarily reflect the self-images of those in power and the official discourses supporting the elite, but rather texts that reveal subaltern voices and visions of the population of those in power and constructions of kingship. This is not easily realized, especially for the period under study, between 1300 and 1800, mainly because of the limitations imposed by the mechanisms of text transmission. In the first place, literature that is often characterized as 'popular' usually flowed in oral circuits and was transmitted through hearsay rather than though written texts. By definition, it is not easy to obtain knowledge about these oral circuits and the material conveyed through them; second, literature that appeared in written form was often commissioned or at least endorsed by either royal courts or the elite of notables, and thus reflected their perspective rather than that of society as a whole; third, if manuscripts or printed versions appeared, at least part of the population could not read or write, and therefore the effect of these texts is easily overestimated. These observations, of course, are more relevant for some places and societies than for others.

The limitations imposed by the contextual factors do not mean that the 'popular' view is completely obscured from our view. As explained above, it is possible to see the development and transmission of culture as a fluid process in which various layers interact. In the field of literature, the material that has survived clearly shows traces of a dynamic interaction between 'elite' literature and 'popular' literature, which did not form separate traditions, but rather fed on each other and contributed to each other's development. For instance, a work produced at a royal court could be a sophisticated and polished retelling of a popular epic, which in turn might be derived from previous court compilations. Conversely, the 'royal' version of a cycle might have provided storytellers with new material, giving new impetus to the oral circuits. The problem from our perspective is that this mechanism is not always easy to unravel. As in the case of the *Thousand and one nights*, the existence of a 'vulgate' of a literary work may obscure its place within the literary dynamics and its prehistory either in written or in oral form; older manuscripts may have been destroyed because a more sophisticated version had come into being; the official version may not have been the culmination of a storytelling tradition, but only an incident after which the oral version of the work was proliferating as before, potentially enriched with new motifs or formal embellishments. Therefore, we can best imagine the development of literary works as a fluid process

in which material separated and converged, was reshaped and reassembled, through the interaction between oral or popular circuits and courts or cultural centres where works could come to the surface that would otherwise perhaps have remained invisible, but that showed only one of their potentially many forms.

Taking these considerations into account, for our present purposes a selection of texts has been made that conforms to the complexities involved. Because of the diffuse nature of literary transmission and the difficulty of assessing the extant material, texts have been chosen that may be characterized first of all as 'hybrid'. That is, they are mostly marked by being situated 'in between' in various respects, in the expectancy that this hybridity will allow us to catch a glimpse of what should be recognized as unofficial or 'popular' discourses, or discourses criticizing the claims of rulers. The 'in-between-ness' of the texts relates to different aspects:

In between elite and popular literature: as argued above, it is not easy, and perhaps even not possible, to draw a line between what may be called 'elite' and what might be termed 'popular' literature. This is partly due to the fact that the domain of popular literature, in the strict sense, is not accessible because the source material is lacking. In addition, criteria to demarcate the two domains may change depending on period and place. It is difficult to determine the readership of manuscripts in, for instance, Ming China or Mamluk Egypt, or to locate the venues and audience of oral storytelling in Persian towns during the Safavids. Moreover, the progress in printing techniques in China and Europe tended to efface the boundaries between the two domains, since material could reach a much wider and more differentiated audience, allowing the emergence of a market for books and the figure of the 'professional' writer. Even in that case, the royal court or other 'elite' centres played a significant role in the collection, recording, and proliferation of texts, establishing the taste of the upper classes as the standard for 'civilized' literature. However, as explained above, the difficulty of marking off the two domains implies a measure of permeability: material from the domain of popular literature flowed into the corpus of canonized high-brow literature and *vice versa*. For the present study material was chosen that shows traces of the two categories, either courtly literature enriched by themes and motifs from popular literature or popular literature stylized into manuscript or printed versions. Consequently, it should reveal the interaction between elite and popular literary discourses, reflecting common perceptions of kingship.

In between genres: In general one might say that in pre-modern times the distinctions between genres were not systematically defined. Boundaries between history and fiction, *historia* and *fabula*, were often blurred; epic romances often

contain important elements of love romances; works of education and instruction are often provided with edifying or exemplary tales; miscellaneous narrative material from various sources may have been integrated into a coherent story or novel; chivalric romances may, almost imperceptibly, turn into novels; political critique may take the form of parables, allegories, parodies, or fictional letters. Here, again, it is the hybridity of the material that will provide a more fruitful insight into the interaction between power and the people, and in the functioning of texts in the formation of ideological discourses. As we will see, generic complexity often adds to the efficacy and impact of a work in relation to its projected aim.

In between old and new: The idea of the fluidity of textual transmission also concerns the periodization of the material. In principle, texts from the period 1300–1800 were chosen, but some of the texts may be based on predecessors from before that period. Moreover, texts may have originated before 1300 but have remained popular for centuries, being re-edited in new versions, adaptations, or compilations. Especially these texts, which circulated for many centuries, have often reached us in relatively late versions (eighteenth or nineteenth century). Of course, this makes it difficult, sometimes extremely difficult, to determine the historical setting to which the narrative refers. To what extent do they reflect a historical context or several historical contexts? To what extent were they meant to convey historical types and stereotypes? Still, the interesting thing is that these texts often have both a historical and a trans-historical component: the evolution of the narrative can often be traced because it combines archaic themes and motifs with 'modern' elements signifying successive transitions in the historical context in which it thrived. This can, for instance, be seen in the apparently contradictory references to ancient kings and technologies of warfare of a much later date. In these instances, too, the hybridity of the texts makes them the more interesting, in spite of the methodological complications.

In between history and fiction: In many of the texts studied here a central role is attributed to historical figures, although the story itself is evidently imaginary. This hybridity is not only intended to enhance the truthfulness of the story, which, in spite of its fictional enwrapping, is still based on historical events; it is also a means to anchor certain values and concepts, represented by the hero, in history, and subsequently to transmit these values and concepts to the transhistorical realm of fiction, where it is not only preserved for future generations, but also formally adapted to be incorporated into the popular imagination and the cultural/literary tradition. If we consider historical texts, generally, as belonging to official discourse, then here, again, we will find a hybrid form in which official discourse overflows into subaltern perspectives.

It should be noted that texts of this kind may have been compiled on purpose by those in power to propagate certain ideas about kingship or to link a ruler to illustrious predecessors. So, again, what we perceive is not a text imprisoned in either official or popular discourse, but rather a text illustrating, even embodying, the interaction between the two. Fictionalization is often required to enable the transformation of history into a narrative, which, in turn, is a precondition for it to be interpreted, understood, and preserved in memory. Fiction subjectivizes history and makes it accessible to the non-specialist reader, situating it in the collective imagination and memory. As we will see, the linking of history and fiction is often accomplished by adding dramatic intrigue, which structures the story into a coherent, meaningful narrative. Still, since the definitions of fictional and historical discourses, as categories, changed over time, it should be kept in mind that it is difficult to assess what was seen as 'fictional' by a broad audience in the past.

In between doctrine and practice: As said above, whereas official discourse is mainly concerned with the principles and concepts of power, preferably on an abstract level, the texts studied here all contain an explicitly 'practical' component, implying that they are predominantly directed at adventures and events. This does not mean that the 'doctrinal', conceptual, framework of power is absent; on the contrary, this aspect is often accentuated. It means that these concepts are not *presented*, but rather *represented*. In most cases there is a duality at work linking abstract principles with concrete events and examples; or with illustrations of them in fictional (or quasi-authentic) tales. This procedure is, of course, connected with fictionalization: by adding a fictitious element, a dialectic emerges between official and unofficial discourses, resulting in the reshaping of an abstract principle into a concrete (but imaginary) narrative element, for example a specific event or a specific narrative *persona*. This is a typical strategy to convey abstract concepts to a broader audience. Conversely, by transforming doctrines into narrative events, they gain access to a different layer of social/cultural discourse, and thereby become part of a tradition which is broader, more resilient, and more fluid than 'official' political discourse, which may be prone to sudden changes of power and the collapse of political structures.

In between languages: The selected texts do not only transcend boundaries between oral and written domains, official or popular discourses, forms (prose, poetry) and genres (history/fiction, epic/novel); they also cross various barriers of language. Some were written in the 'standard' language of official literary style, while others were written in vernacular or contain colloquial elements. Many have been preserved in several languages and thus have become part of various literary traditions and linguistic realms. In some cases, these versions

may indicate conscious translation within the circuit of high-brow literature, while in other cases they just reveal trajectories of a narrative and mechanisms of transmission. In some cases, too, they show how several linguistic and literary realms interpenetrated and intermingled, especially in the Indian subcontinent (Persian, Hindi), Central Asia (Persian, Turkish), and the Middle East (Persian, Arabic, Turkish). Often court languages were different from the language of the people, a situation that, of course, affected the trajectories of transmission of literature and the relationship between popular and high-brow literature, showing the basic dynamics of the proliferation of narrative material. These considerations are relevant not only for the Asian context; in Europe, too, texts circulated in various countries and languages, creating a common reservoir of narrative material, originating, especially, in the Celtic, Spanish, and French traditions. From the sixteenth century, narratives were translated, adapted, imitated, and plagiarized to profit from the emerging market for printed books. These texts are full of Oriental elements and references to the East, heralding the periods of more systematic orientalism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

In between local and universal: As a result of the proliferation of narratives over linguistic, cultural, and social domains, and the adaptations and revisions this implies, most texts show an interaction between elements clearly traceable to the local context and more universal frameworks, forms, and themes. Narratives may deal with a local king or a relatively narrow social embedding, while at the same time dealing with the general issues of power, kingship, and morality. This interaction shows, among other things, how the texts are related to different discursive levels and how they thereby fulfil their function as a medium to channel values and concepts between different segments of society.

These observations about the hybrid character of the source material indicate that the narratives to be examined here are considered to be subjected to both stabilizing and transformative forces, permanently redefining their territories in interaction with contextual possibilities and constraints. Form, genre, social context, language, tradition, and history all contributed to structure the patterns of transmission and transformation, each in its respective pace, influenced by, but not coinciding with, the political structures embedded in the cultural stratum. It will be noted how much this typology of the texts and their place in their cultural environment remind us of the *Thousand and one nights*, as a model representing the confluence and redistribution of narrative material, and showing the complex nature of processes of transmission. Not only the *Nights* as a whole, but many individual stories, too, exemplify this process and are part of it, as ramifications of multifarious corpuses. They show

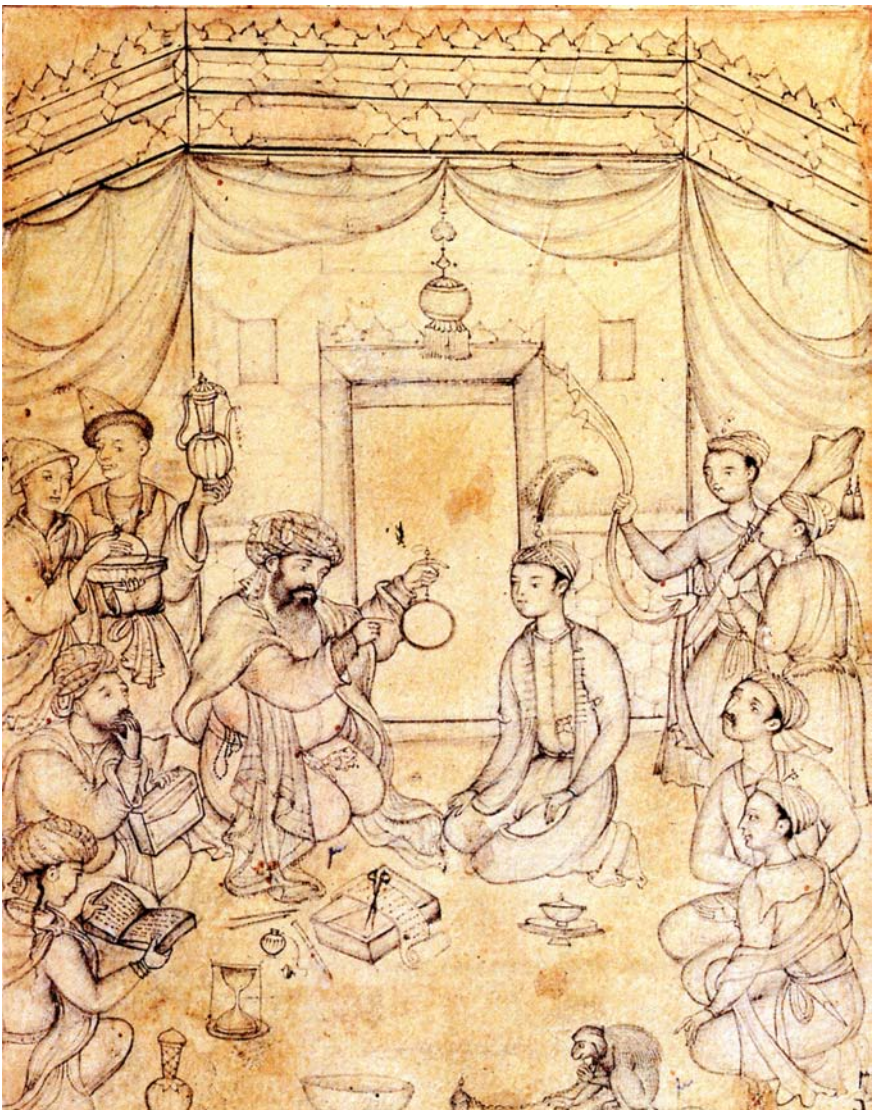

FIGURE 1 *Prince and astrologers, Mughal dynasty, ca. 1585–1590.*

the dynamics and fluidity of the transmission and the influences structuring it, including their incorporation in an agglomerate work such as the *Thousand and one nights*.

On the basis of these hybrid properties, several themes have been chosen to organize the material and its analysis. Within these thematic groups, texts have been selected that illustrate the basic elements and patterns and that reflect attitudes in different periods and places. Of course, it is impossible to

include texts from all societies involved in all thematic groups, and as a rule some examples have been selected from different cultural realms to indicate how themes were incorporated into the narrative texts and highlight potential parallels, and, evidently, significant differences. The thematic groups are the following:

Kings, ministers and concubines: The basic model of this group is the cycle of tales titled *The seven viziers*, or, in Europe, *The seven sages of Rome*. This group is characterized by the triangular relationship between the king and the two figures closest to his personal and official *personae*, and who compete for his attention: the vizier/minister and the concubine/queen. This type of narrative is closely related to the genre of the mirror-for-princes. Apart from the *Seven viziers* cycle, which spread over the whole of Eurasia in the course of several centuries, some other cycles/stories will be analysed with a similar dramatic intrigue from more specific surroundings, all showing a fundamental aspect of kingship: its essentially dialogic nature.

The righteous king and the supernatural realms: This group will be focused on stories in which the ideal king is portrayed in his relationship with the supernatural forces that are hidden under the surface of social and political life in the empire. As in the previous group, relationships with viziers or other counterparts are central. The texts to be analysed in the second chapter are the cycle of the *Thirty-two steps to the throne*, and its cognates, and the Arabic cycle of Harun al-Rashid stories from the *Thousand and one nights*. These narratives are typically centred around an idealized historic or legendary figure who is endowed with the capacity to conjure the refractory demons of evil.

Continuing the theme of the supernatural, the narratives in the third chapter show the strong relationship between royal authority, good governance, and esoteric knowledge. A recurrent theme in narratives of kingship is the relationship between supernatural forces, fate, and the birth of kings. But whereas it is perhaps the king who is predestined to rule, it is the vizier who enjoys the favours of supersensory knowledge and insight. These themes in stories reflect not only harmony in a cosmic order, but also the link between good rulership and esotericism as a phenomenon and a science. The texts that will be studied in this part are the story of 'The queen of the serpents' from the *Thousand and one nights*, the Chinese popular novels *Creation of the gods* and Feng Menglong's *The sorcerer's revolt*, and Jan Potocki's *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. The latter two narratives, in particular, reveal, on the one hand, the deep-rooted connections between kingship and esoteric knowledge while, on the other hand, criticizing forms of superstition.

The king and the knight: In this chapter we will turn our attention to the wide field of the romance of chivalry. The texts that have been selected all show

either the adventures of princes on the way to their predestined kingship, or the relationship between a king (or kings) and a mighty hero, who drastically intervenes in the fate of the empire. The texts are taken from the European, Persian/Urdu, Chinese, Arabic, Turkish, and Malay traditions. They shed light particularly on the ideological premises of royal power and the values and capacities required to preserve it in its pristine form, as it is challenged by a host of inimical external forces. As we will see, although the stories are constructed around the heroic feats of the protagonists, they are steeped in the moral aspects of power and authority.

Kingship and love: In this chapter we select a small corpus of texts that stress the importance of love in the discourse of kingship. Some texts proceed within the generic framework of chivalric romance and gradually transform into a romance of love, set in court circles, such as *The adventures of Brusanus* (Barnabe Riche), *The mirror of princely deeds and knighthood* (Margaret Tyler), and Madame de Lafayette's *Zaïde*. Other romances illustrate the significance of love for the perfection of royal authority and its connection with the forces of fate. These include the stories of 'Sayf al-Muluk and Badi al-Jamal' and 'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur', both from the *Thousand and one nights*, but clearly related to the Hindavi romances *Madumadlati* and the Asian tradition of 'Sayf al-Muluk'. This group shows some interesting developments in the narrative discourses of kingship and some important parallels and differences. But most of all they focus on one of the cornerstones of the whole discourse of kingship: women.

Unrequested counsel: Most of the narratives mentioned above are intended either to instruct the prince or to consolidate and legitimate kingship. In this chapter, we have collected some works that are critical of autocratic and despotic rule, or its effects on the population. Although criticism, of course, has always been expressed in some form of another, within the narrative tradition it appeared especially in periods of enlightenment, in the Ottoman Empire and China in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and in Europe in the eighteenth century. In this chapter we will discuss works by Mustafa Ali, Hung Sheng, Montesquieu, Diderot, Wieland, and Radishchev. Together these texts not only give a nice view of the main discontents of autocratic rule; they also show the interesting effects of narrative dialogism and orientalism for the dislodging of established discursive conventions.

All these texts will be analysed primarily from a narratological perspective, evaluating, first, the relationship to generic types, their narrative structure, and their place in the discourse of kingship as fictional texts; second, inventorying the elements and motifs used to construct a vision of power and kingship, such as ceremonies, objects, material culture, documents, functions, etc.;

and, third, analysing narrative strategies, such as the role of fate, the spatial and temporal setting, the configuration of the characters and the relationship between intrigues and power formation, the role of dialogism, etc. In some cases attention will be given to questions of lineage, transmission, and relationships or to connections with the historical contexts. This attention will necessarily be limited, however, to avoid the problems connected with the lack of interpretive and historical frameworks and because it is practically impossible to sketch the historical contexts of all the works discussed. Evidently, the analytical approach will not be rigidly applied to all texts, but will be adapted to the specific peculiarities of each text. This flexibility will give our discussion a rather essayistic bend; it will not be our aim to strive for a comprehensive overview or an exhaustive analysis of all aspects of the texts. Although it is among the aims of this essay to emphasize similarities and shared elements, in Chapter Six we will present a significant divergence from common patterns. In the eighteenth century specific discursive strategies emerged in Europe that were less conspicuous in other parts of Eurasia. As we will see, new types of literature were developed that deviated from a remarkably consistent Eurasian tradition and that reflected new visions of the nature of texts and literature.

Although it is perfectly possible to read the selected works as material reflecting attitudes and discourses in the period between 1300 and 1800, approximately, it should be kept in mind that the corpus is firmly rooted in a substratum of literature from previous periods or previous traditions. The literature of Mughal India, for instance, has partly derived its material from Sanskrit sources and, more specifically, cannot be dissociated from the great narrative cycles of the *Mahabharata*, the *Ramayana*, and the *Kathasaritsagara* of Somadeva. In Persia it was the wisdom literature of the Sassanid era and the *Shahnama* by Firdawsi that contained a repository of narrative material and literary forms emulated later. In the Arabic and Persian worlds it was the early heritage of *adab* humanism and religious texts that shaped intellectual discourse, later combined with various kinds of romances, while in Europe the echoes of Classical Antiquity and the medieval romances of chivalry (Chrétien de Troyes) reverberated at least until the nineteenth century in what can perhaps be seen as a single literary tradition. In China we have the lasting impact of Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist texts that to a large extent shaped the literature of later periods, even until the present day. In all these early stages literary conventions and traditions were formed that extended into later periods, although they were not, of course, resistant to change. Some traditions were continued in new, perhaps syncretic forms, while others became obsolete and forgotten.

Similarly, although it is clear that most of the works can be situated within a single tradition, with its successive phases of development, we have to be aware of the alternation/oscillation between phases of introspection and isolation, and phases of mutual contacts and cultural exchange. For example, imperial China witnessed several periods of developing native traditions, the legalism of Han, the intellectual experimentalism and Buddhist expansion of Song, the cultural retrospection and enlightened despotism of Ming and Ching, etc. It also, however, experienced periods of intensified exchange with the outer world, through territorial expansion in the north and the west, establishing contacts with Islam, Persia, and Russia, or through maritime activities in the south, involving traders from India, Southeast Asia, Persia, the Middle East, and Europe. The alternation of these historical phases resulted in periods of absorption and openness, and periods of closure and consolidation, and in the formation of a cultural matrix in which literature evolved. Much of the effects of these alternations, and the linguistic problems involved in cultural change, still await thorough investigation.

Among the important instigators of cultural exchange and interaction were the great waves of expansion, such as the Islamic conquests in the seventh and eighth centuries, which, by the fourteenth century, created a commonwealth of empires and kingdoms ranging from the Iberian Peninsula and North Africa to India and Southeast Asia, Central Asia, and the Russian steppes. This massive cultural realm incorporated disparate elements from Christian, Greek, Egyptian, Persian, Indian, and Turkish traditions in various forms, thus acting as a medium for cultural exchange and continuity/renewal. The Islamic expansion was rivalled in Asia by the enormous campaigns of the Mongols and Turks in Asia, which swamped China and opened new channels of communication throughout Asia and between Asia and the Middle East and Europe, finally resulting in the migration of Turkic tribes to the Middle East. Within all these movements, Persia played a pivotal role, both through its trade and through its tradition of kingship, administration, wisdom and science, and, not least, its language and literature. For many ages, Persia set the standards for civilized culture, rivalled only, perhaps, by China. Finally, after Europe had remained enclosed in its matrix of Christianity during the Middle Ages, during the Crusades, and from the expansion of Asian trade onwards, it was exposed to influences that decisively changed its world view.

These complex shifts in the historical setting and their similarly complex relationships with cultural currents and the shaping of literary patterns make the present study a hazardous undertaking. It is, perhaps paradoxically, by not speculating too much with regard to possible connections and interactions that the most convincing parallels can be suggested. Although, as said above,

political frameworks and cultural patterns are not necessarily congruent, and although we need insight into political frameworks to explain cultural change, it may be possible that a more comprehensive view of cultural interactions will shed new light on political frameworks as well.

CHAPTER 1

Kings, Viziers, Concubines

In the Persian/Arabic collection of fables *Kalila wa-Dimna* we read how a scholar is commissioned by the king to travel to India to fetch a medicinal herb. He returns after a while with the text of a book that contains a number of fables inspired by the wisdom of ancient sages. The book is not only meant to edify the general reader; it is more specifically written to enlighten the prince and help him to perform his difficult task as ruler of the empire. This tale and the text that it presents can be regarded as one of the prototypes of fictional literature: fables, that is, invented stories, have the function to educate and instruct the reader; they are not merely entertaining, but are part of the heritage of the wisdom of a community and even of the foundations of civilization. However, they do not transmit this wisdom in a direct and straightforward fashion; they rather represent their wisdom and enfold it in an entertaining and easily palatable form. The text instructs through examples, in order to appeal not only to the rationality of the reader, but also to his or her imagination.

As we will see below, this peculiar form, of a framing story containing a number of inserted tales, is not just coincidental, but conceived to support the instructive function of the text. It creates a situation of dialogues on various levels, between different layers/levels of presentation, between different layers of reality, and between a speaker and a listener. In this way the text not only opens the way to connect the process of instruction to a fictional setting; it also enacts the relationship between the reader and the narrative, giving him or her a role in the process inaugurated within the text. It is no coincidence either that the main character in the work is a king. After all, it is the king who is responsible for the welfare of the community, the preservation of social order and the continuation of the ancient traditions. It is the king who has to be initiated into the wisdom accumulated within the human tradition, not only because he has to act according to its principles, but, more pressingly, because he has to personify it. As a king he embodies the social and cultural values of the empire, and it is his duty to guard their perpetuation.

In this chapter we will examine three texts that show the king in his role as the embodiment of the values of the empire, in the face of destruction, and the dialogical nature of instruction, as a setting for a dramatic spectacle primarily staging three characters: the king, his vizier, and the royal concubine.

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_003
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

The Cycle of the 'Seven Viziers'/'Seven Sages of Rome' and Its Cognates

The development of the literature of wisdom and its importance for the art of statecraft can be traced particularly in the Persian literary tradition.[1] This tradition started in the Sasanid period (224–651 C.E.) and was continued after the Islamic conquest of Persia in the seventh/eighth centuries, finding expression especially in the construction and organization of rulership under the Abbasid caliphs (750–1258). The Persian tradition of this genre reached its apogee in the well-known mirrors-for-princes the *Qabusnama* by Kaykavus (c. 1080) and the *Siyasatnama* by Nizam al-Mulk (1018–1092). These texts are clearly non-fictional, although they contain exemplary anecdotes. The fictional branch of this genre found its model in the cycle of the *Seven viziers*, transmitted in Arabic, too, under the title *The book of Sindbad*, or *The wiles of women*. This work is the more remarkable because it not only became a famous text within Persian and Arabic literature, but also migrated to Europe, where it is known, in various languages, as *The seven sages of Rome*, or, in Spanish, *El libro de Sendebar*, and, in Latin, *Dolopatos*. During its peregrinations it remained remarkably stable, in terms of both its basic form and its dramatic intrigue. It thus became one of the quintessential narratives of kingship in large parts of Eurasia.[2]

An Arabic version of the cycle, titled the story of the 'Wiles of women', was incorporated into the later compilations of the *Thousand and one nights* which appeared in the eighteenth century, suggesting that at that time it still belonged to the current corpus of literature. A more sophisticated version is the Persian text by Zahiri al-Samarqandi, which was written in approximately 1160.[3] The story is simple: A king governs a prospering empire, but he is old and has no son to succeed him. After praying, he begets a son, who is intelligent and virtuous, as beautiful as Yusuf/Joseph, and as perfect as Jesus. However, the astrologers predict that the boy's life will be in danger during his adolescence. For ten years, the young prince is unable to learn anything, and the sage Sindbad offers to assume the task of educating him in the proper conduct of kings, the required virtues, good manners, medicine, botany etc. He has a cubic building erected, with smooth walls on which he paints the basic principles of the various fields of knowledge: astronomy/astrology, human relationships,

1 Charles-Henri de Fouchécour, *Le sage et le prince en Iran médiéval. Morale et politique dans les textes littéraires persans, IXe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 2009).

2 See Killis Campbell, *The Seven Sages of Rome, edited from the Manuscripts, with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary* (Forgotten Books, 2012 [1907]).

3 Zahiri de Samarkand, *Le livre des sept vizirs*, trans. Dejan Bogdanović (Paris, 1975).

diseases, music, geometry, politics, statecraft, law, and justice. After some time, the astrologers warn that according to the prophecy the prince will die if he speaks during the subsequent ten days.

For his safety, the prince is temporarily put up in the royal harem. Here a concubine of the king becomes enamoured of him and proposes to poison his father so that she can become his servant after he has acceded to the throne. The prince does not respond and the concubine, afraid that he will betray her, tears her clothes, scratches her face, and yells for help, maintaining that the prince has attacked her and threatened to kill her. Thereupon the king, infuriated, gives orders to execute the prince. Worried, the eldest vizier intervenes, arguing that the woman is deprived of reason and the boy bears the marks of righteousness, nobility, and intelligence. A rash decision, he says, will lead to regret, when repentance is too late. The assembled viziers now decide on a strategy to save the prince: Everyday one of them will tell a story to the king, in a common effort to persuade him that he should not act thoughtlessly and that he should not trust the testimony of women, who are perfidious, hypocritical, and deceitful.

During the following days the viziers and the concubine each plead their cases. The viziers emphasize the responsibility of the king, whom God has moulded as the epitome of virtue, talent, and wisdom, and who understands the hidden order of things. Being aware of this responsibility, and aspiring to a good reputation among the other kings, for whom he should be an example, he should behave in a prudent, considerate, patient, and circumspect manner, and not impulsively and in anger. He should investigate the matter and not listen to the wily and crafty claims of women. In contrast to this appeal to rationality, the concubine increasingly plays on the king's emotions. She appears before him in tears, with dishevelled hair, bent back, in desperation, pale, with her clothes in disarray, throwing dust on her head and threatening to kill herself. She accuses the viziers of disloyalty and demands a fair trial. Both sides amplify their claims by telling exemplary tales about the deceit of women or men, respectively. In the end, after ten days have passed, Sindbad leads the prince before the throne, pleading his innocence. The king, no longer overwhelmed by anger, judges him not guilty. The concubine is punished; she is shaven, her face is painted black and she is driven through the town on a black donkey preceded by a public bellman.

Compared to the Arabic version in the *Thousand and one nights*, summarized above, which is rather austere, Samarqandi's Persian text is much more sophisticated and accomplished. Samarqandi embeds the story in a layer of historical, moral, and religious contexts. In his prologue he invokes God and enumerates His admonishments: to heed the law, practice justice and devotion,

uphold science and wisdom, and abstain from incorrect behaviour. Because man fears direct punishment more than the hereafter, in order to be effective prophecy requires the help of secular power. Therefore, God has strengthened religion with royalty and the state. The sultan is God's shadow on earth. He should pass his time with philosophers and sages because as soon as he delivers himself to earthly pleasures, he will neglect the affairs of the state and forget to be grateful to God. Then decay will ensue. All these claims are buttressed by quotations from the Qur'an. It should be noted here, that, of course, the main intrigue of the story is linked to an older, religious, tradition, the biblical story of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar, which in the Muslim-Qur'anic tradition is known as the story of Yusuf and Zulaykha.[4]

The Persian text of Samarqandi is probably the most elaborate and sophisticated version of the cycle. We have versions in Hebrew (thirteenth c.), Greek (eleventh c.), Spanish (1253), Latin (fifteenth c.), French (thirteenth c.), and in other European languages. These versions remained in circulation in the subsequent centuries. In all these versions, the cycle of the *Seven viziers* shows a remarkable consistency, retaining its form and intrigue. This suggests that its basic concept has a strong meta-cultural appeal, perhaps not only for its contents, but also because of its narrative form. After all, texts, and generic types, are not only defined by their cultural-historical context, but also have their own internal structure and textual dynamics. It seems justified to say that the cycle of the *Seven viziers* is based on a concept so strongly rooted in the idea and function of narrative texts that it becomes resistant to change. The core of the cycle not only remained intact while it crossed cultural boundaries, it also became the centre of a much broader corpus of texts, which could arguably be called a genre, or a sub-genre, or a generic type, modelled after a prototypal source.

Below, we will discuss some aspects of the cycle as a generic type. 'Genre' will be defined broadly as a corpus of texts related by discursive characteristics that define an agreement between the author and the readers about the way in which the text should be situated within textual and contextual environments, that is, how it should be interpreted, how it relates to reality, and what its intended function is within these environments. For the sake of convenience, we have divided the concept of genre into three constituent components: form, fictionality, and function.

Form. The most conspicuous feature of the *Seven viziers* cycle is its form: It consists of a coherent framing story in which a number of separate (uncon-

4 See Shalom Goldman, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany, 1995).

nected) stories are embedded. This literary strategy, which seems to be as old as literature itself, immediately produces certain effects and narrative dynamics, caused by a systematic differentiation between various narrative levels.

First, the framing device affects the position of the reader, since framing is essentially a multiplication of narrative levels, which suggests that the reader, too, is situated in one of the narrative levels. The effect of multiplication is not directed only inwardly, so to speak, envisioning a potentially endless proliferation of stories-within-stories; it is also directed outwardly, implicating the reader in the narrative process. Thus, the reader, too, experiences what the characters in the framing story experience when they listen to the tales told to them, enabling him or her to identify with the characters and internalize their development. If the characters are 'readers' of the inserted stories, the reader can imagine him/herself as a fictional 'character' taking part in the story.

Second, this identification through framing is connected with the creation of a dialogic situation within the text, that is, the juxtaposition of two different narrative components produced by a dialogic situation in the frame. This dialogism generates several dynamics typical for dialogues in general: It introduces the element of contingency: a dialogue may in principle continue forever, but it may also be interrupted suddenly, or steered into a specific direction, because the process of narration, within the dialogic situation, is dependent upon the reactions of the participants. The participants can manipulate the course of the dialogue by inserting threats, emotions, ingenious formulations, unexpected arguments, etc., or invent ways to either interrupt or continue a dialogue. Moreover, dialogism is always related to processes of interpretation, since it essentially confronts two different views that somehow have to be attuned to each other or at least to reveal some common ground and shared outlooks. It is a matter of contingency if, when, and how this happens, thus not only creating narrative suspense, but also introducing an element of uncertainty.

Third, the framing structure and the dialogical situation produce various forms of interaction between the different levels, such as the juxtaposition of reality with the imagination, relationships between characters within one level or between levels, the opposition of specific spaces, the use of a timeframe within the framing story, or the differentiation between temporal levels, the effect of 'doubling', both of the characters and of motifs and other textual elements, the opposition of a diegetical reality with forms of representation, etc. The splitting of levels provides the author with a whole range of devices to refine his narrative strategies.

These narrative devices are primarily elements available to the author to conceive his work, and although they are enclosed in the concept of the frame

structure, they may not be as relevant in some cases as in others. However, they are potentially present even in quite simple texts, and may have been elaborated in complex forms within the boundaries of a genre. The 'Seven sages' is a relatively simple text in which the mechanism of the strategy of multiple levels is quite effective. This strategy not only strengthens its function as a work of instruction, but, as we will see below, also unravels the various components of kingship.

Fictionality. One of the main constituents of a generic type is the way it defines its relation to reality. Is a text explicitly fictional? Is it the author's intention to construct a realistic setting? Or, on the contrary, is it his aim to deconstruct visions of reality by uninhibitedly incorporating the 'unreal'? How does he combine realistic and fictional elements? It is, of course, not easy to define the concept of fictionality. The strategies used by the author to suggest a form of realism—such as referentiality, descriptions, dialogues—may not be experienced by the reader as realist at all. Or, conversely, outright fictionality can certainly be interpreted by the reader as referring to a 'real' experience. These observations are further complicated when projected on premodern texts, since the boundaries between fiction and non-fiction were not clearly drawn. There is one element that seems to be inherent in fictionality, however, and that is the notion of 'dramatization', the gradual unfolding of a plot and the ordering of narrative elements to serve its construction.

As suggested in the previous section, the frame structure of the *Seven viziers* cycle introduces a complex configuration of realistic and fictional elements. For the reader, the element of fictionality is situated in the framing story. It is here that the initial intrigue is outlined, which is concentrated around a specific number of characteristics. The main fictional motifs are the birth of a prince and the alleged unreliability of the concubine. These motifs are dramatized by placing them in a narrative setting, distributing the development of the plot over a limited number of 'actors'. This fictional, enacted, frame represents the diegetical reality within the work, which generates not only an emplotment, but also a chain of inserted stories. These stories are presented as exemplary episodes taken from real life; they are not 'invented', but rather 'represented' by the narrators. Thus, perhaps paradoxically, although they are told by fictional characters in the narrative, for the reader, too, they retain their exemplary, realist impact. It is only the selection and interpretation of the tales that are engendered and structured by the fictional intrigue. Thus the fictional frame creates a setting, a space, for the representation of what is not fictional, not realistic, but transcending both, a fiction containing truth, a 'real' event becoming a 'model' through a process of fictionalization.

These effects of the play with fictionality are, of course, made possible by the framing structure, with its differentiation and interaction between narrative levels. Through the use of fiction, the author can introduce new settings, new characters, new versions of roles, enabling him to reveal to the reader what is hidden for the characters; he can manipulate the sense of identification of the reader with the characters; and he can construct his discursive aims as the outcome of a narrative plot. The reader is seduced by the fictional intrigue and manipulated by both the exemplary tales and their relation to the plot, and in this way he or she completes the same trajectory as the characters in the frame, from his or her perspective from the 'outer frame'. His or her mirror image is, especially, the prince, who is educated not by mere teaching, but by pictures, images that reproduce the knowledge he is supposed to internalize.

Function. The function of the *Seven viziers* cycle is enacted in the plot of the framing story and can be summarized as supporting the preservation of traditional moral wisdom and explaining its importance for the government of society. The danger to the transferral of this traditional wisdom is represented as a crisis in the succession to the throne. The preservation of the dynasty, and the well-being of society, is threatened at its most vulnerable moment, when kingship has to be handed over to an inexperienced prince. The dangers are represented by the apparent ignorance of the prince and the viciousness and treachery of women. The real threat, however, is in the response of the king to these dangers: if he acts unwisely, the continuation of the dynasty and governance will be in danger; if he heeds traditional wisdom, the dynasty will be saved. It is thus first of all the king to whom the admonitions are directed.

The function of the work is effectuated through its form and fictionality. First, the frame structure can introduce a strategy of temporalization, in which two layers of the dilemma are exhibited: the singular case of the prince and the queen is juxtaposed to a number of examples from real life, linking the specific case to what gradually becomes a model. In this way, the problem at hand is rationalized and objectified, transformed from a specific case into a general phenomenon. The evil concubine step by step becomes 'woman' in general. This 'layering' of the problem through representing it in various ways in 'abstract' stories has the function to deconstruct the superficial, evident nature of the conflict and represent it in other forms, with other actors, from other perspectives, thereby splitting up the narrative construction of the conflict into various aspects, looking at a multiformity of explanations and fostering a distant, abstracted view of the underlying causes. In this way, the conflict can be redefined and its various representations can be reinterpreted.

The formal component is supported by the fictional component, because the enactment of the story through roles and a plot introduces the element of dialogism. The king, the viziers, and the concubine each represent different aspects of the conflict, which cannot at first sight be reconciled. By having these aspects explained in the inserted stories, they are objectified and explored, and in the process the different perspectives are compared and judged, resulting in a common ground, a shared perspective, which makes consensus and a solution possible. Moreover, the characters are representations of figures in society, with their connotations, roles, and properties. They are allegories or symbols related to the crucial mechanisms of social structuring and reproduction, and the fundamental constituents of a social order. Their roles are supplementary but also contradictory, and their interaction reveals tensions and potential harmonies.

The generic components of the work thus enable the characters and the reader to link the specific case to the mechanisms of society and the system of traditional wisdom, which holds that in cases of conflict a king should not act on impulse, but rather look at the case from different perspectives and take time for deliberation. But why is this so vital? This deliberation is necessary not only because it is a matter of life and death to separate the lie from the truth and find out the true facts of the case; it is also necessary because the whole construction of the conflict is embedded in a framework of huge differences of power. The king is, of course, all-powerful, and the prince and the concubine are vulnerable subjects delivered to his arbitrary decisions. However, the power of the king is based not only on his ability to act according to his will on specific occasions; it is also vested in the tradition of kingship and in the authority derived from it. Therefore, there must be some form of mediation to protect the weak actors from the direct, formidable, power of the king and to accommodate the power of the king to a form of authority and responsibility stabilized by tradition. Thus, again, the preservation of traditional values and the principles of justice is based on a transformation of a particular incident into a general system.

In the end, all problems are solved. The truth of the contradicting testimonies is established, the prince has acquired the knowledge and wisdom he needs for succeeding to the throne, and the evil concubine is punished. And, most importantly, the threat to the continuation of the kingship is neutralized and the cycle of the dynasty is restored. Kingship has been preserved as an institution, by accommodating the impulsive inclinations of the king to the broader system that defines authority and justice, and that uses procedures to discover the truth. The severity of the conflict has brought to light the structural elements of a tradition, which are now incorporated in a work that not

only presents them but perpetuates them. Not only do the king, the prince and their empire profit from this outcome, but the reader does as well.

To conclude this brief discussion of the *Seven viziers* cycle, we can say, first, that the cycle shows the essence of the institutionalization of authority, the transformation of power into authority, the application of justice through rational evaluation, the suppression of emotional impulses, and the compliance with traditional wisdom; the procedure for solving conflicts, by an almost ritual inventorization of testimonies, resulting in objectifying a singular incident into general principles. Second, the cycle shows the essence of the function of literature, which is needed to find a form to present the stable core of the tradition by combining aesthetic and didactic components, using emplotment, narrative strategies, fictional elements, formal techniques, the dynamics of dialogism, and forms of dramatization. Third, the cycle shows the relationship between narrative texts and reality, not only indicating that the behaviour of people and the relationships between people are structured by narratives, but also that narratives can intervene in the real course of events. What is imagined, what is narrated, what is spoken, and what is laid down in texts are capable of both disrupting and re-stabilizing the lives of individuals and societies. Narration is the main strategy against irrationality, chaos, and the disruptive force of lies. It is this fundamental purport of the 'Seven viziers' cycle that makes its main pattern so resistant to change.

The 'Seven viziers' cycle thus represents a basic form of the literature of the fictional mirror-for-princes type, establishing the main characteristics, motifs, and form that determine its function in discourse and society. We will encounter this basic pattern in many of the texts discussed below. It exemplifies the principle of dialogism, which is not only meant to facilitate the process of instruction, but also shows that, although the king is the personification of the values and morality of civilized society, he is nevertheless not a monolithic figure. He is, as a phenomenon, of a composite nature, acting in symbiosis with his viziers. He is a human being who is prone to impulses and emotions, and has to be guided by others. Moreover, the principle of dialogism acknowledges the essential contingency of events and decisions, while at the same time suggesting a way to deal with it. The outcome is never certain, but can be deferred and moulded by the use of reason.

The whole process of deliberation and instruction is instigated by the rupture that threatens the kingdom because at first the king has no son and subsequently the prince is almost executed. This motif is omnipresent in narratives about kingship, since the moment of succession is the vital event in the concept of kingship; the moment in which its continuity is determined and its foundations are re-invented and revitalized. This process requires a thorough

initiation of the prince into the principles of kingship, statecraft, and human nature. In this respect, too, the 'Seven viziers' cycle presents one of the narrative elements that will recur in our discussion: the motif of initiation.

The story firmly posits the role of the vizier, as the guardian of tradition and wisdom and as the exponent of reason. Being the all-powerful ruler, the king is obliged to show his might, even by expressing his anger and acting impulsively. It is the task of the vizier to protect him and the subject from the king's inevitable wrath, redirecting it to its normal channels of power exertion. The vizier is indispensable as a stabilizing element in the idea of kingship. Since the nature of arbitrary power demands intimidation and the threat of violence, it is his task to soothe the king's wrath and restore the process of deliberation. Conversely, women are seen as the quintessence of instability and unreason. They are the personification of irrationality, emotionality, rashness, deceit, lust, and disorder. They threaten the established order by penetrating into it through deceit and manipulation, affecting the judgement of the king by arousing his emotions rather than his mind, undermining his awareness of the principles underlying his authority. Women are thus the antithesis of the vizier, the force that permanently endangers the survival of the empire.

The crucial element in the cycle described above is the act of narration. It exemplifies how realism and fiction are not contradictory but rather complementary as a means to understand events and interpret them. In a sense, fictionality contains more truth than reality, because it is abstract and therefore not linked to a specific, concrete, situation. Through fictionalization the essence underlying an event can be made clear, thus laying bare the general rule as opposed to an incidental, unique, response. Ultimately, the magic word in this type of discourse is 'reason', a term that has stability, patience, prudence, judgement, equilibrium, examination, consideration, etc. as its connotations, and that, as a single principle, is a precondition not only for turning power into authority, but also for ensuring harmony in the empire and in the relationship between the king and his subjects. Reason is not confined to a specific context or dilemma; it is the essence securing the preservation of the tradition that protects society. In Samarqandi's version, the principle of reason is connected with the prescriptions by God expressed in the religious tradition. The legitimacy of worldly power lies in the decree by God that man is in need of leadership, supplementing the divine revelation and overseeing the implementation of its regulations.

Variations: The Story of 'Jali'ad of Hind and His Vizier Shimas'

To see how these basic elements can be reconfigured in new narratives in which the principles of kingship are further developed, we will now turn to an interesting story that appears, in Arabic, in the eighteenth-century versions of the *Thousand and one nights*, but that seems to have Persian roots. In the story of 'Jali'ad of Hind and his vizier Shimas' we meet the familiar motif of a mighty king of a prosperous empire, who is just and compassionate, and provides safety, prosperity, peace of mind, and low taxes for his subjects, but who has no son. Then, in a dream, the birth of a son is announced, who will inherit the throne but will become a tyrant and an oppressor. When the son is born, the celebrations are attended by scholars, philosophers, writers, and physicians, and the viziers. The most brilliant of the viziers is Shimas, who is twenty-two years old, but wise and well educated. When the prince, named Wirdkhan, is seventeen years old, his father dies after giving him wise advice, and he ascends the throne.[5]

In spite of his father's exhortations, soon the young king falls prey to his carnal lusts and perverse desires. He collects beautiful women in his harem and withdraws with them in their compounds, neglecting the administration of the empire and the complaints of the subjects. Shimas, worried, tries to persuade him to change his ways, arguing that a king should spend only two hours a day with his women, to avoid harm to the body and the mind. Many kings have come under the influence of women, who are known for their bad advice. Wirdkhan's women, however, succeed in convincing him that his viziers only want to mislead him, one of them saying: 'The king's subjects are his slaves, but now I see that, king though you are, you are the slave of your subjects in your awe of them. […] If they find that you are weak, they will despise you, whereas if they see that you are courageous, they will respect you.'[6] And: 'There is a saying that no one whose heart is not hard as iron is fit to be a king. It is your clemency that has led these people astray so that they have had the impudence to cast off their allegiance to you, although they should be compelled to submit and forced into obedience.'[7]

Gradually, the discontent turns into outright revolt. The people want to dethrone the king, and the notables storm the palace. The king's concubine

5 For a summary of this story, comments and references, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*; *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, trans. Malcolm C. Lyons and Ursula Lyons, 3 vols. (London, 2008) vol. 3, 439–519, 899–930.

6 *The Arabian Nights*, vol. 3, 490.

7 Ibid., 495.

now thinks up a ruse: One by one the viziers are asked to enter the king's room for consultation and are subsequently killed on the spot. Now the king can freely enjoy his carnal pleasures, while abuse of power and oppression are rampant throughout the empire. The king of the adjacent empire hears about the mishaps of his neighbours and sends a letter declaring war. Wirdkhan, desperate, asks the advice of his women, but they say: 'Women's wiles don't work when it comes to war. They have neither judgement nor strength, as these, together with stratagems, are the prerogatives of men in cases like these.'[8] Wirdkhan starts roaming the city and suddenly, by coincidence, finds the young son of Shimas. When begged to help the king, the boy answers that he should ask the advice of his women, but now Wirdkhan says: 'Boy, I acted out of folly, but the plans and schemes of women are very evil', referring to the well-known Qur'anic verse (chapter 12, verse 28).[9] Subsequently, Shimas's son is installed as the new vizier, the hostile king is bluffed away by his wisdom, and the danger of war is averted.

Shimas's son takes this auspicious opportunity to teach the king a lesson: 'Your majesty, you should know that [the cause of your sins] was your love of women, your attraction to them and the fact that you accepted their advice and fell in with their plans. Love of women alters the pure light of reason and corrupts a sound nature.'[10] Wirdkhan argues that the women were responsible for Shimas's death: 'That was not something that I wanted and I cannot understand how I came to agree with them to have it done'[11] The young vizier retorts: 'Almighty God, Who created us, granted us the ability and free will with which to make our choices, so that we only act if we wish to do so, and not if we do not.'[12] The empire is put in order, and the women are imprisoned in the room of the executions and starved to death.

Like the cycle of the 'Seven viziers', the story of 'King Jali'ad' is also meant as the enactment of an intrigue, which facilitates a rich display of the traditional wisdom about kingship. The story is interspersed with exemplary tales, which give the viziers the opportunity to philosophize about the nature of kingship and its positive characteristics:

> It is [God] Who grants kingship and rule throughout the lands to those whom He wishes from among His servants, picking those He wants to

8 Ibid., 500.
9 Ibid., 506.
10 Ibid., 513.
11 Ibid., 514.
12 Ibid.

> stand in His place, acting as His deputies among His creation. He orders these rulers to behave with justice and equity, establishing the laws and customs of religion and acting rightly and properly in the affairs of their subjects in accordance with His wishes and theirs.[13]

A king should be

> intelligent, a master of all branches of learning, the rules of governance and administration, pure in his intentions and treating his subjects with justice. He must show honour and respect when it is due and, when he is in a position of power, he should display clemency where it is necessary. He must look after the interests of both governors and the governed, lightening their burdens, giving them favours, refraining from shedding their blood, attending to their needs and keeping his promises to them.[14]

Such a king protects the empire against enemies and is wise, just, compassionate, and generous to the poor. He is loved by his subjects, enjoys esteem among the other kings, and is blessed with God's benevolence. As long as a king possesses all these virtues, the empire will prosper, the enemies will be defeated, and catastrophes will not occur.

The conditions of good kingship are explicitly expounded when Wirdkhan's education is tested. When the young prince is twelve years old, a palace with 360 rooms is built for him, each dedicated to one of the sciences. Every day the prince enters a new room to be taught new knowledge by scholars. After one year his progress is tested by an examination. First, the admonitions against indulgence in earthly affairs are reiterated: 'Who delivers himself to the scarce pleasures in the world will perish, because he prefers earthly life above the hereafter. […] Whoever seeks a livelihood in this world should not let any day pass without looking towards the next world,' because 'body and soul share the same rewards and punishments.'[15] A king with sound judgement and a clear mind will not be affected by lust and desire. He must keep his base inclinations under control. Here, again, we find the basic message of the story, and of the genre as a whole: The king must act rationally and not impulsively; the desire for women is the greatest threat to the survival of the empire.

---

13 Ibid., 459.

14 Ibid., 452.

15 Ibid., 464–465.

Next, the relationship between the vizier and the king is discussed. First, the hierarchic authority is defined: '[The king's] authority over you is confined to the duty that you owe him, and if you give him this, he has no further power over you.'[16] Second, the tasks of the vizier are explained: 'Advice, diligence both in private and public, sound judgement and the keeping of secrets. […] The vizier must not hide from his king anything that the king should know and he should not neglect to carry out whatever has been entrusted to him, while trying to please his master in whatever way possible without angering him.'[17] He has to behave with reverence, but, if necessary, he should correct him: 'It is his duty to point out the way of justice and fairness, cautioning against injustice and oppression while instructing his master how to treat his subjects well. […] If the king listens and accepts this, the vizier will have achieved his object, but if he does not, the vizier's only recourse will be amicable separation, as this will bring relief to both of them.'[18] The people should respect the vizier, who will protect them against harm.

Finally, the attitude of the king towards his subjects is explained, which should be in accordance with the wishes of God. The king should protect their possessions and women and show magnanimity in exchange for obedience. The king has three duties: the defence of religion; the protection of the subjects; and the safeguarding of the affairs of the state. He should preserve customs; appoint scholars and sages for education; settle disputes; guard the purity of blood; protect properties; avoid heavy taxation; and strengthen the army. Finally, 'the rights owed by the king to his subjects are more binding than those that they owe to him, in that a failure on his part to respect what they are owed is more destructive than the reverse. It is only because of such a failure on the king's part that he will face destruction, together with the loss of his realm and his prosperity.'[19]

The story of 'Jali'ad of Hind and his vizier Shimas' clearly shows the hybridity of the genre to which it belongs, partly conforming to the type of the mirror-for-princes, and partly to a cycle of exemplary tales. It bears resemblance to, for instance, the story of 'Tawaddud', which is transmitted in the *Thousand and one nights*, but also as a separate story, and also to an episode in the epic story of 'King Umar al-Nu'man', in which princess Qudiya Fakan displays her knowledge. In these stories, however, the intrigue is reduced to a minimum. Conversely, a cycle more related to storytelling than to instructive works, but

16 Ibid., 468.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., 470.
19 Ibid.

which is built around similar dramatic intrigues, is the story of 'Azadbakht', or 'The ten viziers'. The plot is slightly different here, because it is the viziers who are the instigators of evil. This cycle was translated by Richard Burton in his *Supplemental nights*, but it was already known in Europe through the version in the manuscript compiled by Dom Chavis, which was translated and revised in co-operation with the French writer Jacques Cazotte (1785). A translation of a Turkish version was published by Comte de Caylus in his *Nouveaux contes arabes* (1788), and an English version by Robert Heron appeared in Edinburgh in 1792. In Arabic it was published in the Breslau edition of the *Thousand and one nights*, and in the partial texts edited by Caussin de Perceval, Gautier, and Ouseley. The story was probably of Persian origin and translated into Arabic and, because apparently it still circulated in Ottoman times, translated into Turkish in the sixteenth century. All these cycles, which were popular across cultural boundaries, are built around the stereotype of the vicious concubine, the initiation of the prince and the inherent contradictions of kingship. This brief survey shows how the generic type of the cycle of the 'Seven viziers', with its peculiar form, survived not only the vicissitudes of time, but also the transition between various cultural domains.

King Wu's Expedition against Zhou and *Proclaiming Harmony*

The cycle of the *Seven viziers* and its cognates give us insight into the narrative strategies used to convey a specific philosophy of kingship based on tradition and religion, and the motifs that form the crucial links between the fictional and non-fictional components. We will now continue to examine the occurrence of these motifs in another tradition of literature and kingship, and in a more novelistic type of narrative. In the Chinese tradition we find similar motifs in narratives that, in this case too, are hybrid, not because they combine instructive and fictional elements, but because they consist of a mixture of historical and fictional elements. The ultimate aim is similar: to show how the moral integrity of the king affects the prosperity of the empire.

As in the case of the Persian/Arabic wisdom literature, Chinese concepts of moral conduct and social order can be traced far back in history. Over the course of centuries, three main philosophical systems developed into the main framework for Chinese thought and shaped visions of life and the world: Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. Although these systems have remained significant, as a framework for morality, until the present day, they have not been resistant to change. They were not isolated from historical circumstances, which instigated them to develop new trends of interpretation, fostering or

repressing their spread, connecting them with or disconnecting them from state interests, etc. Thus, Buddhism witnessed its emergence, its heyday, and its—relative—decline; Confucianism and Taoism took shape within various schools, which were supported by a steadily growing corpus of texts and interpretations; periods of fundamentalism alternated with more liberal trends. So although the three philosophies never lost their importance as a frame of reference, they were not monolithic or stagnant. They provided principles that could be elaborated, but that could also be referred to in their 'pure' form.

The Chinese philosophy of statecraft emerged within this ancient tradition of thought. One of the earliest expressions of this philosophy is to be found in the essays written by Prince Han Feizi, who lived in the Qin Empire in the third century B.C., which represented an important phase in the unification of China as an empire. Although Han Feizi never reigned himself, he left a compendium of instructions for the ruler, which is considered as belonging to the corpus of the so-called Legalist School, a group of scholars who aimed to systematize the basic rules of government in a framework of rational thought. Han Feizis compendium is the main work remaining from this School, and although it is concise, it retained its importance through the ages. It should be noted that the work dates from before the great unified empires, with their almost celestial visions of the emperor. The book does not refer to religion or the divine status of emperors, but rather provides a pragmatic set of instructions to foster the smooth execution of government. Although it is less rigorous, it can be compared to Machiavelli's *Il principe*, which is also concerned with the mechanisms of power, rather than with the theoretical underpinnings of sovereignty.

Han Feizi's main concern in his treatise is not the status of the king, but rather his functioning within the apparatus of government. In accordance with Tao, the emperor is not actively engaged in ruling and commanding; he is rather the embodiment of the order in which the state apparatus functions, and the medium that makes its functioning possible. He represents order rather than installing it and only has to guard the proper functioning of all components of the state. The basic tasks of the state are, first, the securing of sufficient revenues to enable it to efficiently exert power; and, second, the strengthening of the army to support the authority of the sovereign. The basic principle of the organization of the state is rationality, that is, judgement solely based on the examination of evidence and upholding a uniform set of laws, which replaces the multifarious system of customs, inherited rights, and privileges of the previous regimes. It is, of course, this latter principle from which the school obtained its denomination of 'Legalists'. It marked the beginnings of legal philosophy in China, which remained influential throughout the centuries.

In his book about statecraft, Han Feizi discusses diplomacy, economy, war, and administration on a very practical level, depicting the behaviour of the prince and his relationship with various functionaries. He is exhorted to systematize the organization of functions and tasks, defining and distributing them according to strict and fixed regulations, constantly comparing the formal tasks with the results of their execution. Since the regulations are clear and unambiguous, evaluation is not subjective, depending on human judgement, but objective, based on facts recorded in written reports. In this way the merits of all functionaries can be assessed. A system should be introduced in which written accounts, reports, inventories, calculations etc. are essential, because it is the effectiveness of the results that counts. This implies that not the individuals but the system prevails and that the emperor's task is limited to the installation of the institutions, regulations, and principles that safeguard objectivity. He should instate a natural order from which he can more or less remain absent.

The 'objectification' of the state functions is one of the main concerns for Han Feizi, because it is here that he sees the main threat to the proper functioning of the government. The greatest danger to the position of the emperor is the appointment of disloyal and corrupt officials. These not only take bribes, falsify reports, and build a clientele of loyal subordinates; they are also prone to undermining the authority of the emperor by creating their own power base within the state apparatus. By doing this, they not only weaken the position of the emperor, but also disrupt the functioning of the government and spread their corruptive evil to all segments of society. This will lead to a decline in agriculture, the fragmentation of the army, the collapse of the legal system, and, ultimately, the incentive for foreign foes to invade the empire and destroy the dynasty. To avoid this calamity, the emperor should always carefully select his ministers and insist on the meticulous execution of the tasks linked to specific functions and ranks. He should behave in a very reserved manner, so as not to disclose his true feelings and preferences, and he must examine the reports of the bureaucracy and be rational and consistent in his rewards and punishments. Most important of all, he should monopolize the granting of rewards and punishment to prevent the ministers from appropriating responsibilities that would enable them to carve out an independent power base.

As is clear from the above, the legalist system is founded on rationality and objectivity to such an extent that human inclinations and subjective preferences within the state apparatus should be considered as an immediate threat to the empire as a whole. Han Feizi emphatically warns the proto-emperor not to cultivate an affection for singing-girls, because this would obscure his judgement. Passion is here, as in the cases discussed above, presented as a destructive

force, which should be controlled and suppressed. How passions can cause the destruction of the empire is one of main themes in Chinese literature in its various phases. An early example is the short novel *King Wu's expedition against Zhou*, by an unknown author and probably datable to the beginning of the fourteenth century. It describes the collapse of the Shang dynasty, which was replaced by the Zhou Empire in 1066 B.C. According to the translator, it is a rather rough narrative, not very sophisticated, taken from what probably was a storyteller's manuscript.[20]

The novel opens with a brief recapitulation of the descent of the main character of the story, King Zhou, who was the last ruler of the Shang dynasty. The story begins like a chronicle, summarizing the forefathers of King Zhou, who is briefly typified as a king who led a 'voluptuous' life; the state affairs were decided during orgies, and hence the state was not peaceful and war ensued. Nevertheless, as a man King Zhou was a genius: He knew the works of hundreds of classical authors; he was able to count sheep without making mistakes; he could defend himself against a thousand men and drink a thousand cups of wine; he had a deep, loud voice, and his handwriting followed the 'Pa-Fên' style; he was forty-seven years old, handled heavy boughs and wild horses with ease, and subdued the barbarous tribes. At first his kingdom was well organized, with a Great Admonishing Minister, a Court Adviser, a Great Marshal, a First Military Governor, an Officer Administering the Court, and eight Earls who were the pillars of his power. Every year a libation ritual was performed before portraits of his predecessors in the presence of the Earls.

On an ominous day the king joins his spouse for a visit to the Jade-Maiden Temple. During the ceremony he sees the clay statue of the fairy goddess who is a 'damsel of unique beauty'. The king is deeply struck by her beauty and at night has a dream in which she hands him a sash and promises to meet him after hundred days. In the morning he realizes it was just a dream, but he still has the sash. To assuage his desire, he gives an order to collect the most beautiful girls of the kingdom to select a new concubine. One of the candidates is Daiji, the daughter of an official. While she is sleeping, the night before the audience, she is approached by a 'nine-tailed and golden-haired' fox-spirit, who 'drew away air from the nostrils of the girl as well as her marrow. Then the body of the girl was empty and very thin. The fox then blew air into the body, thus changing the soul of the girl, making her bewitching.'[21] The girl, thus turned into a fox-

20 *Wu wang fa chou p'ing-hua*, in: Liu Ts'un-yan, *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese novels*, vol. 1, *The Authorship of the Feng Shen Yen I* (Wiesbaden, 1962) v–vi.

21 Ibid., 11–15.

spirit, is of indescribable beauty, and inevitably she is chosen by the king as his new favourite.

From the moment Daiji enters the palace she imposes her will on everyone. She has the Jade-Maiden Temple destroyed out of jealousy and orders the construction of sumptuous palaces. The Earls and the Ministers are shocked and try to persuade the king to abandon the ambitious building plans:

> My lord, why do not you follow the good example of Yao and Shun, and have a peaceful world? Shun set a good example in promoting filial piety to other nations, and Yü is credited with control over the floods, helping thousands and thousands of people to escape calamity. [...] Listening to Daiji will bring ruin to our country and our families and the people will suffer.[22]

Daiji threatens to lock herself up and die if the king obstructs her plans, and the palaces are built in spite of the protests of the Ministers. Earl Ji Chang predicts that the immoral, voluptuous life of the king will destroy the nation, as has often happened in the past. He mentions the example of King Jie, who 'enjoyed himself amid beauties and with what we call mountains of meat and pools of wine. He caused naked boys to play licentiously with nude virgins. He lost the country because he was ruthless.'[23] He wasted money on building projects while the people became impoverished and destitute. The Earl is punished for his comments.

The unrest at the court is exploited by the corrupt minister Fei Zhong, who concocts a plot to strengthen Daiji's position. She is to visit the queen, hide a dagger in her (the queen's) robe and hurry out of the room with dishevelled hair, screaming that the queen attacked her and threatened to kill her. The scheme is successful: The queen is thrown from the Star-Plucking Building and dies, and all her maids are killed by being drowned in the wine pond or by being cast in the serpent cauldron, which is filled with snakes, lizards, and scorpions. The nurse of the young prince survives and tells the lad what has happened. Daiji now says that the prince has hit her, and he is condemned to death. Before he is executed, however, he is snatched away by a mysterious man.

The outrageous schemes of Daiji trigger a revolt by the righteous faction of the Earls and the administrators. The revolt is initiated by the prince, who wants to collect an army to dethrone the king. A coalition is formed, which acts

22 Ibid., 19.

23 Ibid., 21.

as a kind of counter-kingdom, where forces of revolt gather under the good and just leadership of Ji Chang and later his son Wu, and against the clique of the traitorous Fei Zhong. After fierce fighting, the capital of Zhou is conquered and the king and Daiji are decapitated.

This brief summary shows that, as in the case of 'King Jali'ad', the novel about the downfall of King Zhou is made up of elements from different genres. It is first of all presented as a historical account, referring to historical figures, a historical episode, and information gleaned from historical sources. The historical dimension, shaped by some formal and stylistic strategies, such as the chronological summary and the list of state functions, provinces, etc., is clearly intended to add to the suggestion of authenticity and realism, strengthening the message conveyed by the story as rooted in historical truth. Because it cites examples from the past as significant lessons for the future, it positions itself within the reservoir of historical exempla, which together illustrate an essential truth, in the moral and the political senses. Still, history itself mainly records events without explaining them. To make history and the lessons it contains comprehensible, some new element has to be added that gives insight into psychological motivations or the intervention of outside forces. In itself history is stable and self-reproductive, so how can decline have set in?

In order to squeeze the meaning of historical events out of straightforward chronological accounts, a fictional element has to be added, in this case represented by the episode of the Jade Maiden and the metamorphosis of Daiji. This episode explains to the reader how the seemingly sensible and just King Zhou, presented as the strong pivot of the empire, became affected by passions and thereby caused the weakening of the state structure and the moral fibre of the empire. The intrigue is set in motion by an impropriety, in this case the desire of the king for the Jade-Maiden statue, which unleashed the intervention of supernatural forces in the form of the fox-spirit taking possession of Daiji. This brings the supernatural element into the historical process, as an intruding force disturbing the regular order of things. It immediately evokes supernatural counter-forces, such as an enchanted sword and a magic bracelet that deter demons and the prince who is born from a female corpse in a grave and who later, with a divine axe that only he can handle, helps to defeat the evil king and his concubine.

A remarkable episode, linking the story to supernatural forces and even the hidden forces of fate, involves Earl Ji Chang, who at the beginning of the revolt hands himself over to King Zhou and is imprisoned. He tells his sons that they should come to rescue him after seven years, because only then will the ruthless king be chased away. When one of his sons arrives after seven years, he is killed by the king and served as food to Ji Chang. After this awkward meal,

FIGURE 2 *Mounted official, China, 1296.*

Ji Chang is set free and becomes the leader of the rebels. This episode is not merely a fictional element inserted to conjure the supernatural forces who have caused the evil turn of events; it is also a means to link the story to a tradition with a strongly moral content. This is indicated by the references to Zhou's predecessor King Tang, who is mentioned in the beginning as an example of a virtuous king. After being invited three times to ascend the throne, he finally complied, put an end to cruelties, and organized the empire according to auspicious signs. After some time, a period of starvation set in. The king prayed for rain, but the Grand Historiographer said that a man should be burned and dedicated to God. Subsequently, without hesitation, the king had a pyre built in the mulberry wood and was burned together with his queen and their son. Immediately rain started to fall. This (pseudo-)historical anecdote, together with the reference to the lascivious King Jie and Ji Chang's self-sacrifice, reveals how personal virtues and moral strength can change the course of history, because they are linked to the cosmic harmony that ensures the welfare of the kingdom. The virtuous Ji Chang becomes the ruler of a rivalling kingdom, and his son Wu not only succeeds him but also defeats King Zhou and takes his throne: the cosmic order is restored.

Apart from the combination of historical and fictional elements, which serves as a catalyst to reveal the moral layer of history hidden underneath the events, the novel also displays some significant principles of statecraft. First, the reign of Tang is referred to, which is later mentioned again as an example of righteous kingship; second, the capacities of King Zhou and the early organization of his kingdom are described; third, when events take an ominous turn, the Earl and Ministers warn the king by referring to good—

and bad—examples from the past and general principles of administration. And, finally, the notion of good administration is linked to the figure of Earl Ji Chang, the first official to admonish the king, and the commander of the rebels who set up a rivalling rule. Among the tenets marking Ji Chang's rule is that the people should not be oppressed, because they 'are the basis of a nation and depend on the nation'.[24] His administration is based on care for the miserable and the solitary, the advancement in office of men of talent and virtue, the optimal use of manpower, and the king's sharing his soldiers' suffering and pleasure.[25] These principles, based on acknowledgement of the rights of the people and of the danger of corrupt officials, together with moral integrity, are the solid foundations of the enduring state. Below, in our discussion of the novel *Creation of the gods*, which is based on the same story, we will see how these principles are connected with the overarching celestial forces.

Proclaiming Harmony

The principles of kingship expounded in *King Wu's expedition* are confirmed and supplemented in a remarkable novel titled *Proclaiming harmony*, which is also a vernacular romance written by an unknown author, probably in the first half of the fourteenth century. This novel is also an account of historical events and based on historical sources—even incorporating passages from chronicles. It relates the final days of the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127 C.E.), when the last emperor of the dynasty was deposed by the invading Jürchen tribes from Mongolia, who established the Jin dynasty in 1126. It covers the period 1069–1124, comprising the appointment of Wang Anshi as Grand Counsellor, the fall of the Song capital, and the abduction of the royal family to the north, followed by the foundation of the second Song dynasty under Kang (Gaozong) in the southern capital Hangzhou. The novel was very popular in the sixteenth century, but was banned around 1700 by the Manchu rulers because of its anti-Mongol bias. The second part of the story gives a lively and detailed description of the suffering of the emperor during his abduction by the nomads, and thereby supplements the novel *Yue Fei*, which we will discuss in Chapter Three.[26]

The story of *Proclaiming harmony* begins with a general statement of the forces determining history and linking it to the basic principles of the universe:

24 Ibid., 37.

25 Ibid., 37, 44, 59.

26 See for the historical context: F.W. Mote, *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1999) 206 ff.

'These two patterns, of order and disorder, are merely part of the pattern of Yin and Yang. China, the enlightened man, and the great order of Heaven all belong to Yang. The tribes, petty man, human lusts—these all belong to Yin.'[27] If Yang is in the ascendant China will be tranquil, the ruler will be enlightened, and the empire will be at peace and fertile; if Yin is dominant, the tribes will rule, selfish men will be promoted, and hunger and discord will reign. 'This alternation of Yin and Yang all depends upon good or evil intentions of one man—the emperor.'[28] Subsequently, the story itself is picked up with, first, a prediction that a Southerner will be employed who will bring great disturbances to the empire. This ominous figure is Wang Anshi, who 'makes wickedness look like loyalty and calumny look like truth. He maintains an outward appearance of ingeniousness; yet in his heart he is a conniver.'[29] After his appointment he immediately starts to nominate his son-in-law and his son-in-law's brother to important offices and to scheme against his rivals. He 'ruins honest officials, conspires with scoundrels, spreads vicious rumours, cheats the emperor, and mistreats the people.'[30] To make things worse, he ushers in a period of reforms called the New Laws.

After five years the emperor dies and the new emperor Huizong accedes to the throne. He is described as very talented: He is a painter and a calligrapher, and he is well versed in the Three Teachings and the Nine Schools. However, he is inclined to 'trifling amusements and sensual pleasures.'[31] He loves exotic flowers and animals and curious rocks. Moreover, he allows his minister to embark on enormous public works and the construction of luxurious palaces. In the course of time, he comes under the influence of a Taoist sage and becomes increasingly immersed in religion. He limits the influence of Buddhism and encourages the study and practice of Taoism, swelling the numbers of Taoist priests. He becomes engaged in superstitious practices. As a result of his neglect of state affairs, the evil officials can do as they please; they close the imperial factories, dismissing thousands of workers, and force generals and soldiers to form bands of robbers. They invite sycophants to the court and encourage the emperor to indulge in useless pastimes.

In a crucial episode in the novel, the emperor, at the instigation of his ministers, agrees to go on licentious excursions in the less reputable streets of the

27 *Proclaiming Harmony*, trans. William O. Hennessey (Ann Arbor, 1981) 3.

28 Ibid., 4.

29 Ibid., 11.

30 Ibid., 13.

31 Ibid., 14.

capital, dressed as a common subject: 'He hastily doffed his dragon robes and slipped into a black sack, a purple doublet with red silk knotted tassel turban, and black boots. They sneaked out of the rear gate of the Forbidden City.'[32] In the street of the most famous courtesans of the capital, he 'inadvertently' catches a glimpse of a beautiful lady, 'a maiden with clouds of raven hair styled with golden phoenix combs. Her eyes sent glances like glittering autumn waves beneath brows as dark as the hills in spring. Her waist was pliant like a willow, and her flesh was creamy white. She had long and slender fingers like shoots of spring bamboos and exquisitely firm and tiny bound feet.'[33] The emperor is immediately infatuated with her and sleeps with her. The courtesan is Li Shishi, who already has a lover, who, not unexpectedly, is angry at her. Nevertheless, the emperor cannot resist the temptation of Li Shishi's beauty and starts paying her regular visits. Her lover becomes a nuisance and threatens to create a scandal about the emperor. Still, in spite of the warnings of some faithful ministers, the emperor settles Li Shishi in the palace and has her sit next to him on the throne.

Instead of restoring some kind of order, the new arrangement accelerates the fall of the empire. The queen, inconsolable, predicts a bad outcome: 'The three bonds of family and the five constant virtues are being dragged to the ground. When men have a sense of decorum they are strong; having it not, they are destroyed.'[34] At court disorder is rampant, the influence of the Taoist sage becomes destructive, and the emperor has an ominous dream. In the meantime the Jürchen 'barbarians' become more and more obtrusive. In the end, the emperor abdicates and the Jürchen sack the capital. They begin 'moving out official records of the Imperial Academy, the Three Offices, and the Six Ministries, as well as census maps for administering the empire.'[35]

Among the many interesting elements in this novel, apart from the escapades of the emperor, is the prominent role of the ministers in the process of decay. This role is emphasized not only by the distribution of the characters over the various factions, but also by inserting the literal texts of memorials submitted by officials to the emperor to explicate their opinion and to advise or correct him. There is, for instance, a memorial against the policy of Cai Jing, the protégé of Wang Anshi, who is depicted as the great villain of the story and the instigator of all evil. Also a memorial is included criticizing the lascivious

32 Ibid., 62–63.
33 Ibid., 63.
34 Ibid., 79.
35 Ibid., 120.

excursions of the emperor, warning him against depravation and the ruin of the empire. The memorial is surprisingly explicit, qualifying Li Shishi as an 'ignoble whore' and her residence a 'brothel'.[36] When the emperor fails to heed this advice, he is admonished again: 'You are disrupting the regimen of the court and neglecting the administration of the government, while bandits act freely.'[37] And: 'Only when men have degraded themselves can others degrade them.'[38]

These inserted texts are not only meant to give the narrative a more realistic, historically faithful appearance; they are also included to illustrate the importance of the ministers in the process of government and to emphasize their responsibility within the administrative apparatus. They have a role that is to some extent objectively linked to the institutions and not to the emperor as a person. Thus, from the perspective of their 'objective' task, it is their duty to summon the emperor to mend his ways. Before warning the emperor of the dangers of his lasciviousness, one of his ministers reflects: 'Mencius has said: "One whose responsibility is to give advice should resign if he is unable to give it, even if it meant discountenancing the emperor."'[39] The minister should provide the ruler with good advice, even at the cost of his life, or else resign. Therefore, in this text, too, a form of dialogism is constructed, which, on the one hand, regulates the relationship between fictional and 'real' components and, on the other hand, facilitates the configuration of good and evil forces. And, finally, this device makes possible the amalgamation of the story with the wisdom of statecraft, displaying its principles within a fictional setting.

Concluding Remarks

The narratives discussed above are not joined together in one chapter in order to argue that they are in some way or another historically linked. As observed in the introduction, such an effort would be beyond the scope of secure and sound argumentation. It is not without significance, however, that similar themes, motifs, and narrative procedures became popular within distinct cultural and historical contexts: European, Persian/Arabic, and Chinese. It would seem that the concept of kingship evokes similar associations in diverse societies and that

36 Ibid., 73.
37 Ibid., 78.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid., 73.

similar techniques were deemed appropriate to explore them. Perhaps the similarities are due not to any kind of essentialized archetype of kingship or to an ultimately identical process of developing ideas about it, but rather to the relationship between power and texts, and the way in which texts function to structure discourses of authority. For the moment, it is important to draw attention to some motifs and procedures that we will encounter more frequently in our discussion of other textual types below.

The motifs that are central in the narratives above and that to a large extent determine their characteristics include, first, the motif of rupture and discontinuation of the dynasty, as a result of either the loss of the heir to the throne or the careless behaviour of the king. The end of the dynasty imposes the necessity to reformulate the essentials and principles of kingship, so as to re-establish the empire on its proper foundations. Thus, within a text, it allows the combination of a fictional intrigue with a reiteration of wisdom, represented in either fictional or non-fictional form.

Second, the crucial role of the ministers shows that the authority of the king is not monolithic or vested in the person of the king alone, or at least that it is embedded in a wider discursive environment. The king may embody power, quite literally, but this power is derived from a context that is (also) vested in institutions, discursive systems, and other participants. It is not merely that the power of the king is mainly symbolic and that for the implementation of his decrees he is dependent on others; it is rather that the relationship between power and authority is ultimately established by a dialogic process. As we will see in other cases, too, this is a paradox at the centre of the construction of kingship: The king embodies sovereignty, and in this condition he enjoys absolute power, but because he is all-powerful, he is not capable of doing anything he might wish. In order to fulfil his function as the locus of power effectively and harmoniously, his power has to be limited by the intervention of ministers, institutionalized procedures, and discursive frameworks, so that the forces of power are transformed into authority, which is not solely dependent on the use of violence.

Third, the threats to the empire are in all four cases caused by moral depravity, emotional impulsiveness, and irrationality. These adverse tendencies are systematically related to the disastrous interventions of women. If kings represent the power of the state, women represent power of a different kind, not based on 'objective' institutions, but on emotions, the senses, and subjective human impulses, which are inherently destructive. The drama takes place at the interface of these kinds of power, and the result should be that the king's power is in the end transformed into regular authority while the concubine's power is annihilated morally, physically, and discursively. In this

misogynous scenario, women represent desire, loss of control, vulnerability, emotional blackmail, irresponsibility, pleasure, craftiness, immorality, jealousy, all characteristics irreconcilable with rationality and social harmony. And rationality is the crucial principle on which the state is founded and on which its survival depends.

These three elements are the basic ingredients for a dramatic enactment constructed by using different layers of texts. This hybridity is achieved either by playing with narrative levels within a narrative frame or by combining historical narrative—including realistic effects—with fictional narrative. As said above, this procedure is first of all meant to create a multiple perspective on the intrigue, which makes an interpretation of a given situation possible and at the same time lays bare the process of interpretation. It is this procedure from which these texts derive their force as part of discourses of power: They show what they represent; they embody the process that they reveal: how power is rationalized to become institutionalized in a form of authority. They both represent and enact the process of discursive formation. Fictionality is an indispensable part of this process, since it represents and reveals the link between the abstract, discursive, level and perceived reality.

The main problem that is elaborated in the texts is how the institutionalized power of the king is related to the power of a specific king in a specific situation. The general dilemma is perhaps best exemplified by the Chinese case. In Han Feizi's philosophy the emperor is both the 'absent' centre of a depersonalized, objective, structure of power, which is basically an apparatus meant to integrate procedures. Power is objectified in institutions, functions, and formal procedures as the organizational centre from which harmony and equilibrium radiate over society. Simultaneously, it is the emperor in whom the forces of Yin and Yang manifest themselves, and it is his behaviour that determines the functioning of the system. Thus, power is both personal and impersonal; the emperor both embodies power and situates it outside himself. Especially the novel *Proclaiming harmony* shows how this apparent contradiction imposes itself on history and how specific events bring up the problem of the two manifestations of power. In the case of the *Seven viziers* the situation is less abstract: The king is inclined to use his power in his guise as a human being, and in fact he is supposed to show his anger as a sign of his power, but he is alerted in time to the fact that he should take on his guise as a king bound by institutions and principles sanctioned by tradition and, especially, by the principle of sound judgement and rationality.

The choice of rupture as the main catalyst of the discourse of kingship is, of course, no coincidence. If there is one underlying concern that has inspired the texts analysed in this chapter, it is the necessity of continuity.

The harmony, prosperity, and well-being of society lies in the continuation of what has been accumulated and elaborated within history and tradition, and the development of rational principles. As the narrator of *Proclaiming harmony* sighs when he describes emperor Huizong: 'He has destroyed the world of his ancestors. […] Never did it occur to him how difficult it had been for his forebears to build their empire.'[40] It is here that the centrality of women becomes clear: within the fictional element they are represented not only as a source of disruption of the objective order, but also as a precondition of continuity and reproduction, with their connotations of subjectivity.

40 Ibid., 7.

CHAPTER 2

Gods, Demons, and Kings

In our analysis in the previous chapter we have caught a few glimpses of the relationship between kingship and the realm of the supernatural. In Han Feizi's manual and in *Proclaiming harmony*, royal authority is explicitly linked to the cosmic forces, and the downfall of King Zhou in *The expedition of king Wu* is partly due to the intervention of celestial deities and fox-spirits. The stories casually refer to magical objects, prognostic dreams, foretelling signs. In the Chinese and the Arabic/Persian narratives astrologers present their insights as matters of fact, convinced that the natural order is connected with the configuration of macrocosmic forces. Although these elements are not much elaborated upon—showing their common acceptance—they clearly suggest a link between supernatural forces of various kinds and human life in general and kingship in particular. The king is not merely subjected to these supernatural forces, like all human beings; he is part of them on a specific level and in some ways is used as an instrument by them or as a manifestation of them.

In his book *The millennial sovereign; sacred kingship and sainthood in Islam*, Azfar Moin argues that in Mughal India (1526–1857) and Safavid Persia (1501–1722) notions of kingship were modelled on Sufi and messianic patterns.[1] Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), in particular, juggled with religious concepts to construct his own religious myth of himself as a great sovereign and spiritual guide, connected with the Islamic millennial. This trend was initiated by Shah Isma'il in Persia, who also cultivated a kind of saintly status for the king as a messianic saviour. The incorporation of mystical and astrological elements into the definition of kingship in this period shows how Asian Islam developed its own concepts based on a religious undercurrent of popular beliefs and rituals inherited from ancient times. It shows the capability of embracing religious particularities caused by religious diversity within the empire, even to the extent that heterodox ideas were incorporated into syncretic belief systems. It also shows how discourses of kingship were constructed in such a way that they conformed to existing customs, traditions, and practices in order to appeal to and be accepted by the population. Existing religious concepts and practices

1 A. Azfar Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2014).

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_004
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

structuring forms of authority were integrated into the process of transforming power into authority.

In the realm of Islam, the construction of kingship, or royal authority, along these lines is, of course, related to the historical decline of the worldly authority of the caliph, after approximately 900 C.E., and the subsequent multiplication of sultanates all over the Muslim realm. Whereas the caliph had been and perhaps remained God's delegate on earth, enjoying the endorsement of 'official' religion, the sultans had to derive their status from the acknowledgement by the caliph and some form of religious legitimacy. This legitimacy could be sought either in doctrinal religion, striving for the purification of the faith and strict adherence to the legal prescriptions, or in an appeal to sentiments among the population based on indigenous customs and traditions, whatever their relationship with 'official' religion might have been. Or, and this seems more likely, the claims of kings may have been different in the various layers of discourses of kingship, exhibiting a more doctrinal attitude in official discourse, while a more syncretic image was spread within popular discourse. In both cases, literature would be an appropriate channel to convey the respective images, anchoring the idea of kingship in the collective imagination.

In this chapter we will examine some clusters of narratives characterized by the links between royal—and vizier's—authority and various kinds of supernatural forces, mostly related to popular beliefs about gods, demons, and spirits. These forces are a challenge for the prince, who has to prove his might in the face of these powers, often having recourse to the supernatural potential of the true faith. In this chapter we will discuss the Indian cycles of the legendary emperor Vikramaditya and tales of a similar type, especially the *Thirty-two steps of the throne*, together with the Harun al-Rashid cycle from the *Thousand and one nights*, and the Chinese novel *Creation of the gods*.

The Prince and the Demons of Evil: The Legendary Vikramaditya

It is a common feature of all literary traditions that narrative material tends to coalesce around certain historical or legendary figures. In Europe the main example is probably King Arthur, who, as a historical figure, became the centre of a large corpus of romances and mystifications. Another important example is, of course, Alexander the Great, whose adventures have become the nucleus of a vast array of narrative material that became popular from Europe to East Asia. Figures such as these tend to attract material that is not necessarily related to them, and they are not always the main protagonist; they are rather the centre organizing a corpus of stories that are mythologized and projected

onto society, imparting them with their image and reputation. In this way their mythical image is preserved for the future together with the narrative material, which would otherwise perhaps have disappeared in the folds of history. Therefore, figures such as these are not only centres structuring discursive material, but also vehicles for texts, enabling and structuring their transmission. Apart from these functions, material of this kind can shed light on visions of kingship as they emerged in a specific time and were preserved and adapted within generic types.

In this section we will discuss two cycles of stories that have taken shape in different versions and forms and that show, first, the ways in which the ideal of kingship is related to specific figures that have thereby turned into a stereotypical persona, and, second, the way in which these figures combat evil that appears in the guise of demons, enchantments, or pseudo-enchantments. In these cycles we will find some narrative strategies that have been discussed in the previous chapter and several motifs that we have examined there. The device of the framing story comprising a chain of inserted tales is particularly prominent, as is the principle of dialogic exchange between the king and an 'adviser'.

The Thirty-Two Steps of the Throne

The narrative cycle of *The thirty-two steps of the throne* has been preserved in various versions, which not only represent the kernel of a narrative type, but also the syncretism of its development over time. It shows that this narrative material was transmitted over the centuries, in various languages, and remained relevant even in modern times. In the eighteenth century, manuscripts of the work were still circulating in India, and translations into French were made in 1817 and 1883. The prototype of this cycle is probably the similar cycle *The five-and-twenty tales of the genie* (*Vetalapancavinsati*), which originated in the oral storytelling tradition and was incorporated into the large compilation *Ocean of the streams of stories* (*Kathasaritsagara*) by Somadeva (app. 1070). The most sophisticated version is the one by Sivadasa, which was compiled around 1300. It is embedded, of course, in the great Sanskrit tradition of storytelling, represented by the *Mahabharata* and the *Ramayana*, both treasuries of narrative material, figures, motifs, tropes, plots, and forms, and both a source for the oral and scriptural literary traditions.

The *Twenty-five stories of the genie* is a frame story in which the legendary beginnings are related of the kingship of Vikramaditya, the stereotype of the ideal monarch, who was a ruler, a warrior, a scholar, a patron of the arts,

and, most of all, a man of compassion and self-effacement.[2] In the frame it is disclosed that the stories of the cycle are told by Indra to his consort Parvati, the Mother of the Universe, and are overheard by Brahmana, who spreads them in the world. The cycle begins with the meeting between a yogi and King Ghandarvasena, who is enraged by the relentless silence of the sage and decides to send a prostitute to his abode to seduce him to speak. The ruse is successful, and a child is born, which is killed and cut into three pieces that are spread over the world. At the places where the pieces land three brothers are born simultaneously, and a prophecy holds that one of them will become the paramount ruler of the world. A sage visits Vikramaditya, the son of Ghandarvasena, and takes him to the cemetery to meet a yogi who needs his help. Vikramaditya has to carry a corpse hanging from a tree to the yogi, but he is not allowed to speak. However, the corpse is possessed by a genie, and every time Vikramaditya takes it on his shoulder, the genie starts telling him a story asking a question at the end. When Vikramaditya, inevitably, answers the question, the corpse returns to the tree and the procedure starts again. This is repeated twenty-five times. Finally, the genie tells Vikramaditya that the yogi intends to kill him, because then he will receive knowledge of the principles of kingship. Vikramaditya, thus warned, kills the yogi in a ritual fashion and receives the eight 'Perfections' granting him the supreme lordship of the earth.

The whole episode of Vikramaditya and the genie is meant to undo the harm done by his father Ghandarvasena, which brought a kind of enchantment into the world by violating the yogi's contemplative silence. The incentive of the king is, apparently, to have access to the realm of wisdom personified by the yogi, but his ruse is a contamination of the yogi's sanctity, associating him with foul, earthly affairs. The result is a scion filled with the lust for power, as if wisdom, unleashed by an evil trick, aims at nothing less than world dominance. It is Vikramaditya's task to lift the enchantment by ritually killing the vicious yogi; he thereby completes the cycle of an 'original sin' that results in the proliferation of evil, by showing that he is prepared to sacrifice himself to correct the course of events. In the process, he is initiated into the wisdom of the world and is thus educated as a future king, combining courage, compassion, judgement, and knowledge. He is now prepared to receive the eight 'Perfections': to be minute as an atom or enormous as a mountain, light as air or heavy as rock; to be invisible at will, to have all one's desires fulfilled; to subject others to one's will and to have rulership over the world.

2 Sivadasa, *The Five-and-Twenty Tales of the Genie*, trans. Chandra Rajan (London, 2006).

The main motif, which sets the narrative in motion and which involves the various characters in an intricate intrigue, is, paradoxically, silence. It is the impregnability of the realm of wisdom, personified by the yogi, that causes the king's trespassing, and it is Vikramaditya's refusal to remain silent that prepares the way for the felicitous outcome. And it is the process of storytelling, in the liminal phase of Vikramaditya's trajectory towards kingship, that actually contains the wisdom that is the basis of sound rulership. Therefore, Vikramaditya's apprenticeship is not confined to a ritual, breaking a vicious spell; it consists, on the one hand, of his willingness to sacrifice himself and, on the other hand, of his sagacity, which, through the process of storytelling, results in a new equilibrium between power and wisdom and in the subduing of the destructive forces. Evil is contained not only by ritual, but also by narration and speech. His reward is the ultimate kingship: Vikramaditya is not merely a king; he is a portion of the Divine, born on earth; he will rule not only on earth, but also gain sovereignty in another sphere of existence. Siva says to him: 'A mighty lord, of my essence you are, a ray of light from me, born here, on earth.'[3]

The prominent role of storytelling, in the form of exemplary tales that contain a moral dilemma, draws attention to the dialogic nature of the narrative. As in the cycles analysed in Chapter One, the combination of a frame with inserted tales creates a dual vision of reality, consisting of a material and a discursive component, and revealing the hidden layer of meaning within a specific sequence of events. This hidden layer in the end provides the key to the solution, but it has to be 'unearthed' first. The dialogic structure of the narrative is embedded in the fictional intrigue in the frame story, with, on the one hand, the failure to establish communication and, subsequently, the exchange between Vikramaditya and the genie. It is the establishment of a dialogical situation that creates a balance between events and interpretation, between power and wisdom. In the end, after the felicitous outcome, the king states his wish: 'Grant that this work, *The five-and-twenty tales of the genie* may become celebrated and gain renown. By your grace may this genie be my minister and carry out my edicts!'[4] Finally, even the genie takes off his mask and turns out to be a common vizier.

The lore of Vikramaditya's ascent, which made him the prototype of the just and wise king, is also part of the prehistory of the cycle *Les trente-deux récits du trône*. As *The twenty-five tales of the Genie*, this cycle is a frame story

3 Ibid., 181.

4 Ibid.

containing exemplary stories set in a frame in which the origin of the cycle is explained and enacted. The main character is Bhodja, a historical king who lived in the fifth century C.E. and who acquired wide fame for his wise rule. It is told in the framing story involving a throne, found on a farm, that can be taken to the royal court only after a solemn ceremony. As the king tries to climb the steps of the throne, he is halted by a genie, who tells him the history of the throne: In the town Avanti the king offended his brother Vikramaditya, who left the country and started roaming the world. After the death of the king, everyone who succeeded him was immediately killed by a vicious genie (*vetala*). Vikramaditya returned to the court and became king, escaping death by preparing food for the genie every day. At a certain point he asked the genie whether he would be capable of adding or subtracting one year from his (Vikramaditya's) life. When the genie answered that he could not, Vikramaditya attacked and subdued him. After this episode, Vikramaditya's adventure with the evil yogi follows, resulting in his receiving the divine throne from Indra, embellished with thirty-two statues on thirty-two steps. When he seats himself on the throne, he is endowed with the virtues of Indra: heroism, energy, activity, intelligence, science, firmness, profundity, and severity. After his death the throne remains empty, because nobody is worthy of it.

After this introductory tale, Bhodja ascends the throne, but he is stopped by the genie of the first statue, on the first step, who tells him a story containing some meritorious instruction. This continues until after thirty-two steps/stories Bhodja is allowed to climb all the steps. As in the cycles discussed above, the stories told by the genies are exemplary tales in the sense that they present some wisdom or moral dilemma or model of virtue and justice. They illustrate the nine states of the soul and the eight vices. An important element is the supernatural powers attributed to objects such as magical shoes, or talismans, or 'Mulika', an object that fulfils wishes; and to demons, such as the Raxas, which are anthropophagous, and the Nagas, which are snakes living in water underground. Another magical element is metamorphosis, characters assuming different appearances usually in different lives. A curious 'realistic' tale relates the working day of the king Vikramaditya: He wakes up to the accompaniment of music and singing; then follows time for meditation and prayer; the girding of the royal weapons and insignia; giving presents to the counselling and executive ministers and other sages. Midday: fulfilling the prescriptions of the Veda and giving alms to the sick and the poor; a meal with parents and friends and allies; four courses in six tastes; taking betel; washing with aromatics (sandal); a nap; enjoying birds, parrots, flower festoons; having fun with young women; listening to stories; inspection of the troops, treasures, and

landed possessions, with the inspectors; ceremonies prescribed by the Vedas with the Pandits according to Castras; entertainment, music; permitted unions (?); sleep.

In another, Persian, version of the *Trente-deux marches du trône*, Rajah Bhodja consults the stars and attempts to climb the throne.[5] Suddenly a swarm of thirty-two big bumblebees appears, morphed genies sent by God to guard the throne, since it can be occupied only by someone who is as virtuous, good, and disinterested as his predecessor Vikramaditya. Every time Bhodja wants to climb another step, he is stopped by a genie who tells him a story of the great magnanimity, altruism, and goodness of Vikramaditya, obviously to instruct the rajah during his ascent to kingship. Each story contains an example of some virtue, such as controlling one's anger, self-sacrifice, generosity, forgiveness, prudence, courage, magnanimity, sound judgement, consideration, alertness, trust, etc. In most cases some moral dilemma must be solved or cases of extreme generosity, altruism, or courage are expounded. Several stories are known from other cycles, not only other versions of the *Thirty-two steps*, but also collections such as the *Sukrasaptati*, or the *Tales of the parrot*, and some motifs even reached the *Thousand and one nights* in some of its versions.

In a typical story, Vikramaditya sends inspectors out into his kingdom to report on the conditions of the people. One of them returns and reports that he passed by a temple on a mountain next to a lake haunted by a genie. Whoever entered the water and was virtuous came out covered with white spots; when a sinful person entered the water he came out covered with black spots. Vikramaditya, curious, sets out to explore this phenomenon. He enters the lake and is covered with white spots. At the same place he meets a Brahmin who has to atone for some sin he has committed; he will be pardoned only when he has bathed in the blood of a rajah. Vikramaditya immediately seizes his sword and cuts off his own head, but at that point the good genie Behekouty intervenes and saves him. This is only one of many examples of situations in which Vikramaditya is willing to sacrifice his life to undo some kind of spell imposed, mostly, on a person or a place. Usually he is rescued by Behekouty and rewarded for his altruism.[6]

In another story (XIII), which is instructive as a guide for kings, Vikramaditya wants to inspect his empire. He sets out incognito, dressed as a *djogui* (yogi), with the intention to gather 'certain and uninfluenced' information about

5 *Les trente-deux marches du trône ou comment mériter le pouvoir*, trans. Daniel Lescallier (Paris, 2014).

6 Ibid., 77, 83; stories VIII, IX.

everything affecting his government and to check that his mandataries do not abuse their power and commit injustices. At one point he overhears a conversation about a city on an island governed by a djinn who has demanded that a temple be built for him where a man is sacrificed every day. Vikramaditya travels to the city on his magic chair and offers himself as the next victim. When the genie arrives, he shows no fear and converses with the genie about his bad habit, showing pride that he is to be eaten by such a noble person. The genie finally repents and promises that he will refrain from eating human flesh in the future.

Some stories are directly related to Vikramaditya's status as a king, for instance in story XIX when a Brahmin tells him that he has visited a temple of Shiva at the seaside. Every day a golden column rises out of the water with a throne on top of it. At sunset it disappears again. Vikramaditya journeys to the place and sees the column rise up out of the water. He flies towards it on his magic chair and sits down on the throne. Since the sun is burning hot, clouds are sent to protect him and water from the source of life. Honoured, Vikramaditya thanks the sun and receives a talismanic ring that the sun has taken from its own ear. Later, Vikramaditya roams his capital in disguise and presents the ring to a poor Brahmin on the street. This story, of course, aims to confirm the semi-divine status of Vikramaditya's kingship, which is acknowledged by the Supreme Being. At the same time, it emphasizes his humility and generosity, and his lack of desire for material gain.

Vikramaditya's humility is confirmed in several other stories, such as the story of a rajah who is too assiduous in his religious duties and neglects the affairs of the state. He is expelled by genies who support his successor, who is less extreme in his religiosity. This is reprehended, although it is stressed that the turn of events reflects the will of God:

> Vous voyez par cet example que tout ce qui existe dans le monde est un effet de la volonté de Dieu qui peut à son gré faire d'un rajah un infortune; et mêttre sur le trône un indigent.—J'en suis plus que jamais convaincu, répondit le rajah, j'ai toujours été persuadé que les souverains sont comme les autres hommes, sujets comme eux aux vicissitudes du sort; qu'ils ne peuvent obtenir le respect et la consideration qu'en remplissant avec exactitude les devoirs nombreux qui leur sont imposés et en faisant le bien.[7]

7 Ibid., 151, story XVI.

Apart from this recognition of God's supremacy, Vikramaditya also recognizes the importance of respect for the labours of the common people:

> Un rajah ne doit jamais perdre de vue que les sommes dont il dispose sont le produit des sueurs de son people et ne doivent être employées que pour le bien de l'État. Ce rapport essentiel entre le gouvernement et les gouvernés, ce lien intime de confiance et d'attachement réciproques entre eux cesseraient si celui-ci avait la faculté de se procurer sans eux et par un moyen étranger et extraordinaire tout l'or qu'il pourrait desirer, et l'honneur serait perdu.[8]

Clearly, the position of the rajah is somewhere between the celestial powers and the common people, subjected to the will of God, but endowed with the ability to conjure the spirits of evil, with the aim of stabilizing the prosperity of the populace. In one of the stories, the seven good properties of a king are symbolized: life and health, sound judgement, prudence and wisdom, a filled treasury, military arts and a strong army, prospering agriculture, and steadfastness.[9]

The intermediary position of Viramaditya between the gods and the people is highlighted by his ability to subject spirits and his systematic renunciation of the magical objects he receives for his noble deeds, such as magical rubies or rings that bring worldly profits. He is concerned with piety and serving God, but he is also preoccupied with the practical welfare of the people, which is threatened by evil demons or cruel enchantments. It is worth noting that the religiosity in the Persian version of the cycle shows a gradual shift. Whereas the Bengal version is clearly a reflection of the Hindu cosmology and mythology, in the (later) Persian text we find more references to typically Islamic phenomena, such as *houris* (the virgins in paradise), the term *darwish*, in addition to *yogi*, and even the pilgrimage to Mecca.[10] As we will see, this intermingling of Hindu and Muslim elements was by no means an exception in Indo-Persian literature, and it shows how at a specific level certain concepts, practices, rituals, and figures from one religion could easily be accepted within the imaginary of the other religion. In particular, the motifs of the genies, the enchantments, and the subjugation of magical forces appealed to the general audience, regardless of its religious affiliation.

---

8 Ibid., 54, story v.

9 Ibid., 256.

10 Ibid., 102.

In several respects, the cycle of the *Trente-deux marches du trône* is a logical sequel to *The twenty-five tales of the genie*. It is less archetypal, but it has retained the specific, formal procedure. It has evolved through history and has perhaps become diluted, but it has also assimilated elements from new environments. Both cycles show similarities with the cycle of the *Seven viziers* and its cognates. The dramatic intrigue is caused by a rupture—in the case of *The Twenty-five tales* involving a licentious woman—and in the end the restoration of harmony is achieved through a combination of ritual and narration, itself representing the result of this process: the embedding of power in a setting in which storytelling symbolizes the medium of rationality and of conjuring disorderly forces. And here, too, this medium is engendered by situations of dialogism, between the sage and the king, between the demons and the king, and between reality and the imagination. The aim in the end is a combination of initiation and conjuration, in order to install a harmonious structure of authority, endorsed by God and without undue interference by supernatural forces.

Harun al-Rashid, Vizier Ja'far, and the Jinns

In his study of the Arabic tradition of kingship Aziz al-Azmeh argues that discourses of authority, especially concerning kings, caliphs, and sultans, can to a large extent be found in works within the genre of the mirror-for-princes. Whereas treatises on the political and juridical aspects of kingship are relatively rare, the codes of conduct for kings, guidelines for government, and general principles for the legitimation of rule are often expressed in semi-fictional handbooks, either treatises including literary elements or literary works containing practical wisdom.[11] This observation suggests that in the Arabic literary tradition there is a strong connection between authority and narration, based on a similar connection in the Sanskrit and Persian traditions of wisdom literature. It seems that this convergence of fictional narratives and discourses of authority is not merely a question of generic categories, but rather a deeply felt sense of symbiosis between the essences of authority and the imagination. This is confirmed by our findings above, in connection with the cycles of the *Seven viziers*, 'King Jali'ad', and *The twenty-five steps*.

11 Aziz al-Azmeh, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London and New York, 1997) 89–93.

In Arabic literature, one of the rulers who attracted the attention of storytellers and literati is Harun al-Rashid, the historical caliph, who became the subject of many anecdotes in *adab*—highbrow—literature and of several stories incorporated in the early and later versions of the *Thousand and one nights*. It seems that he came to represent the glorious days of the ʿAbbasid caliphate, with its connotations of prosperity, cultural refinement, intellectual and artistic progress, and religious orthodoxy. Although the status of a caliph differs from that of a king, as 'commander of the believers' rather than as the ruler of a state, he came to represent a quintessential conception of Islamic rule, including originally Persian elements of kingship, bureaucracy, and court life. His rulership therefore contained both secular and religious components legitimizing his privileged position, although, especially in Harun al-Rashid's time, it was clear that the caliph was bound by religious law like all his subjects. It is probably his combined religious and worldly attributes that made him attractive for storytellers and authors as a subject for their portrayal of an 'ideal' prince, comparable to Vikramaditya and others in the Indian and Persian traditions.

Here it is not my intention to study the way in which the historical figure of Harun al-Rashid is represented in Shahrazad's stories, but rather to examine how a perception of 'kingship' is construed through the association of authority and storytelling by staging Harun al-Rashid as a character in the stories and as a ruler. Can the interaction between storytelling, or, more broadly, the imagination, and authority, as presented in the cycle of the *Seven sages* be perceived in the Harun al-Rashid stories as well? And, our main concern in this chapter, how is the interaction between the caliph and supernatural phenomena incorporated into the stories to strengthen his claims to kingship? We will zoom in on the two stories of the 'Porter and the three ladies of Baghdad'[12] and the story of the 'Mock caliph'.[13] The first of these two stories is part of what is commonly held to be the original 'core' of the *Nights* and is thus firmly linked to the framing story, while the philological status of the latter story is still unclear, although a version of it can be found in the work *I'lam al-nas* by al-Itlidi (seventeenth

12 For a summary of the stories and references to analyses, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*; *A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entituled The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night*, trans. Richard Burton, 10 vols. (s.l., s.d., [Burton Club, 1905?]) vol. 1, 82–186.

13 Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 1, 304–305; *A Plain and Literal Translation*, vol. 4, 130–148.

century).[14] It was incorporated into the *Thousand and one nights* in the Egyptian versions of the eighteenth century.[15]

The Harun al-Rashid stories that are included in the *Thousand and one nights* can be divided into three groups: first, the anecdotes situated at the caliphal court in Baghdad, often including other famous historical persons, such as Zubayda, Abu Yusuf, and Abu Nuwas; second, the stories in which Harun al-Rashid plays a nominal role, only to effectuate the plot, as a personification of authority or a *deus ex machina*; and, third, the stories in which he is a character participating in the deployment of the narrative or even sets the narrative in motion. The anecdotes of the second category are presumably taken from *adab* texts and are clearly different from the main type of stories collected in the *Thousand and one nights*. They give us a picture of Harun al-Rashid as a narrative persona, portraying him as an absolute ruler who is rather impulsive and naïve and who is implicated in various comic intrigues typical of a royal court. The second type of story is also of significance, since it stresses the absolute power of the caliph, but links it to an inclination to clemency and justice. Here, too, the humorous side of Harun al-Rashid, which became a topical feature of his persona, is emphasized. In our discussion it is stories of the third type that are most relevant, since they show Harun as a more complex narrative 'construction', including the trope for which he became especially famous: his nightly excursions to inspect the conditions of his subjects.[16]

The first story to be analysed here is the complex narrative of the 'Porter and the three ladies of Baghdad'. In this story a porter is hired by a lady to carry all kinds of foodstuffs and party equipment to a luxurious mansion, which turns out to be owned by three young ladies, who intend to have a party that evening and allow the porter to attend. As the party develops, three mendicant dervishes are allowed to come in and, somewhat later, Harun al-Rashid, his vizier Ja'far, and his swordsman Masrur, dressed as merchants, join the company. They are all admitted into the house on condition that they do not ask questions about what they see, as is indicated in a verse above the entrance. At a certain point one of the ladies brings in two dogs from another room and starts whipping them, but she consoles them afterwards. Eventually the two other ladies start lamenting and show their bodies, which are covered by scars.

14 About al-Itlidi and the *Thousand and One Nights*, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 606–607.

15 Ibid., vol. 1, 304–305.

16 See entry 'Hârûn al-Rashîd', in Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, vol. 2, 585–587.

At this point, the porter cannot control his curiosity and asks what the strange scenes mean. Angry at this impertinence, the ladies summon seven black slaves to kill the visitors, but before being killed they have to tell their life-stories. The dervishes tell their strange adventures, and Ja'far tells a concocted story, after which they are all released. The next day the caliph, restored to his true identity, has all those involved in the events taken to the palace and asks the ladies to tell their stories. It appears that the dogs are two envious sisters of the eldest lady who were turned into dogs by a spell. Harun summons the *jinniyya* responsible for the spell and commands her to lift it. The other two ladies turn out to have been the victims of unfaithful husbands. Harun subsequently solves all problems and restores normality.[17]

As the summary shows, the story of the 'Porter and the three ladies' has some basic similarities with the framing story of the *Thousand and one nights* and with the *Seven viziers*. It is constructed as a frame story, with embedded stories, and linked to the 'ransom motif', that is, to storytelling to avoid a seemingly certain death. Here the story is not triggered by a traumatic event of adultery, but in the end it becomes clear in the stories of the ladies that the events that have led to the death threat were in fact caused by unfaithfulness and disloyalty. This unfaithfulness has resulted in the ladies having to survive on their own and their retirement together to a separate household. This, of course, is a social anomaly, which is buttressed by the strange ritual of punishing the enchanted dogs. To hide this curse, the ladies have constructed their space as a separate domain in which visitors are restricted to obedience and can speak only to a certain limit. As in the case of the framing story, the tension between the sexes has led to a stagnation of the normal course of events, which is preserved by a kind of ritualized spell. It is the act of storytelling that in the end reveals the secret behind this anomaly and that enables Harun to set things straight and restore life to its normal course.

Another similarity between the story and the framing story is the state of liminality caused by the events—especially the enchantment—and into which Harun al-Rashid is drawn. To be sure, he is not forced to become involved, but is rather prompted by his own curiosity. The act through which he enters the liminal status is his disguising himself as a merchant, which enables him to throw off the decorum of sovereignty and mingle with the common people. It enables him to bridge the gap between his absolute authority and the essentially powerless subjects. This creates the prerequisite conditions not only for any form of communication, but also for a negotiation required to comprehend and finally

17 For various discussions of this story, see: Ibid., vol. 1, 326.

counter the anomalous situation. After all, it is not simply storytelling, but storytelling to solve a predicament that ultimately leads to the denouement. It should be noted here that although by disguising himself Harun throws off the externalities of his authority and exposes himself to potential dangers, he does not relinquish the 'material' supports of his power, represented by Ja'far and Masrur. Once Harun has resumed his normal position and the relationships of authority and subservience have been restored, he can enforce an end to the state of liminality.

Before we proceed with an evaluation of the character of Harun al-Rashid in this story, we will first discuss the second story in which Harun al-Rashid—or even two Harun al-Rashids—plays a major role. In the story of the 'Mock caliph', Harun al-Rashid sets out at night to inspect the city, with his vizier and executioner, disguised as merchants. When they want to make a boat trip on the Tigris, they are warned that the caliph is accustomed to take a boat trip every night and has threatened to have anyone who ventures on the river beheaded. After a while they see a boat approaching with a stranger in caliphal robes, sitting on a throne, in the company of men dressed as Ja'far and Masrur and other court dignitaries and drinking companions. Eager to find out the secret of this impersonation of the caliph, the next night they furtively join the company, which enjoys a luxurious banquet in a palace on the shore. At a certain point, when a love-poem is sung by a slave-girl, the host, dressed as the caliph, tears his robes from his body and shows scars of whipping. It turns out that the mock caliph is a jeweller who was married to Ja'far's sister, but was unjustly repudiated by her. From that moment onwards, he had assumed the role of caliph every night. The next day Harun summons the estranged couple to appear before him and reconciles them.[18]

Even in this brief summary some by now familiar features stand out. First, the ill-fated love-story that leads to a strange, anomalous situation, perpetuated through ritual-like behaviour; and, second, the caliph entering a liminal situation by disguising himself and mingling with the common people. Finally, although the ransom motif is less conspicuous, it is present in the death threat against anyone 'trespassing' on the Tigris, forcing the caliph to follow and join the party of the mock caliph unnoticed. In the end it is the telling of a life-story, embedded in the main story, that brings about the satisfying outcome of the adventure. Apart from these characteristics, which link the story both to the framing story and to the story of the 'Porter and the three ladies', the motif

18 Ibid., 304–305.

FIGURE 3 *Chinese pantheon, by Athanasius Kircher* (1667).

of the whipping and wailing as a result of unrequited love strengthens the links with the latter story, both structurally and thematically.

The most distinguishing characteristic of the story of the 'Mock caliph' is, of course, the figure of the false caliph, acting as a mirror-image of Harun al-Rashid. The motif of the body-double can be found quite often in the *Thousand and one nights*, and it is prominently present in the framing story, which is marked by the symmetry between Shahriyar and his brother and between Shahriyar and the black slave pleasuring the queen. In the latter case the motif is linked to the question of authority: the black slave is the antithesis of the king and by being his 'mirror-image' either reduces the authority of the king to a mere trifle, or proves that the king is essentially no better than a hideous, lustful servant. Both possibilities show Shahriyar that because of the presence of his wife—the element of passion and chaos—his authority is not vested in the symbolic, institutional authority connected to the kingship and his masculinity, but rather in his bodily presence, falling apart as soon as he is away from the palace. This reveals both the complexity and the fragility of royal authority.

A similar discovery occurs in the story of the 'Mock caliph', where the mirror is not so much spatial—the king leaving his palace, divesting it of his royal authority—, but temporal, according to the dualism of day and night. During the day everything follows its regular course, but at night the caliph dons his royal garb, detaches himself from the externalities and paraphernalia of his power, and is absorbed by the 'common people', only to be confronted with his nocturnal antithesis, who has usurped the royal prerogatives to dominate the space of Baghdad with his threat. Rather than the 'physical' absence of the caliph, it is the 'symbolic' absence of the caliph that allows the false caliph to take his place, just as it is not the physical but rather the symbolic prerogatives of the sovereign that he usurps, the power that emanates from the paraphernalia and externalities. This is achieved by evoking a situation of make-believe, a performance and the effectuation of a fantasy. It should be noted that, of course, the real caliph, disguised as a merchant, is performing a role as well, completing the fictional character of the scene.

It is the existence of his body-double that forces Harun al-Rashid to act in order to redress the anomalous situation, because it is a situation that cannot be tolerated, as is cleverly foreseen by the false caliph: the only one who will dare to uncover him will be the real caliph, who, on that occasion, will be obliged to deal with his problem in a discreet way. It is suggested, therefore, that even imagined authority can be effective, that a performance has the power to change the course of events and enforce a specific outcome.

Harun al-Rashid and the Discourse of Power

As becomes clear in the analysis above, there are many formal and thematic links between the two Harun al-Rashid stories and the framing story of the *Seven viziers*, linking them to the concept of authority, which is expressed in the framing story and the mirrors-for-princes as a discursive genre. Moreover, the stories fit very well into the genre and conform to Shahrazad's purpose in telling the stories: they show the nature of power, its being curbed by rational decisions, and its complexity. As such they have an instructive and didactic value and refer to the same thematic complex as far as authority is concerned, as does the framing story, presenting examples of the sovereign confronted by an anomalous situation, which he has to judge and solve in a rational way. In this sense, Harun al-Rashid is the typical sovereign, with absolute power, and implicated in stereotypical roles. In his narrative guise, he has become a quintessential ruler within the discourse of authority.

Of course, the actions of Harun al-Rashid are not instigated by some 'classical' trauma, as in the case of the cuckolded kings. Harun is usually prompted by curiosity, which suggests a basic dualism in his mind and uncertainty about the effectiveness and effects of his absolute power. To a certain extent, his royal power distances him from 'real life', forcing him to temporarily cast off his caliphal dignity with its social and spatial barriers. This curiosity is, of course, a prerequisite for the potential of Harun al-Rashid as a narrative figure himself, or his character, being a source of narrative dynamism opening up the space for storytelling. His curiosity, as a literary element, is nicely exploited in both stories: when in the house of the three ladies curiosity is explicitly forbidden by the verse above the entrance, thereby establishing a specific relation of power heightening suspense and foreshadowing the course of events, and when the caliph asks the boatman to approach the barge of the false caliph, 'he being in the light and we in the dark, so that we can look at him without him being able to see us,' elegantly buttressing the antithesis between the two caliphs of the night and of the day.

Although the stimulus of the story is not a traumatic experience suffered by Harun al-Rashid, it is in fact traumatic experiences that are the underlying spur to the story as a whole. As in the case of the framing story of the *Seven viziers*, these experiences are related to rejected love, the struggle between the sexes, and the perfidy of passion, thereby linking issues of sexuality to the discourse of power. In the case of the three ladies it is the unfaithfulness of men and the jealousy of women that have led to the socially exceptional situation of three ladies living an isolated life together outside the custody of men. It is this anomaly that provides the narrative potential in which Harun

al-Rashid's peculiarities are deployed. Although it seems that because of their 'curse' they have established a feminine authority within their domain, the message of the story is not overly feminist, since it is especially herein that lies the anomaly that Harun al-Rashid has to resolve. However, this motif parallels the story of the 'Mock caliph', in which an aborted love leads to an 'enclave' of alternative imagined authority within society, forcing the ruler to respond, a situation similar to Shahriyar's anti-female regime that leads to stagnation and ruin. In the case of Shahriyar the physical act of a woman destroys the symbolic authority of the king, whereas in the story of the 'Mock caliph' the harshness of a woman brings forth an—admittedly imagined—symbolic authority in a man. In both cases it is suggested that women, or perhaps more correctly, a harmonious relationship between men and women, are the key to the integrity of authority, amalgamating its physical and symbolic components.

In the Harun al-Rashid stories a deconstruction of the stereotypes of power takes place, made possible by the caliph's disguise and his wish to remain incognito. In both cases he willingly subjects himself to women, the quintessence of irrationality, and to someone who impersonates him and whose claims to authority must inevitably be false. In both cases he takes the risk of being killed, a risk enhanced by his impulsiveness, his naivety, his curiosity, and his difficulty in maintaining his disguise. As has been remarked above, however, the risk is reduced because Harun has himself accompanied by Ja'far, who constantly tries to avert dangers by giving sensible advice, and Masrur the executioner. As in the case of the framing story, the inversion of roles is connected to the situation of liminality into which the caliph enters and which is part of a renegotiation of relationships, which may lead to a solution of the dilemma, for instance through the telling of life-stories and the uncovering of hidden intrigues. Only through entering a liminal situation and finding an imagined form to express the underlying trauma can authority be mobilized to resolve the anomalous situation, going through a phase of make-believe and temporarily assumed roles.

In the Harun al-Rashid stories, the caliph is presented as a stereotypical figure, both as a narrative character, and in his association with the general type of the absolute sovereign. In the story of the 'Three ladies', which we know only in the context of the *Thousand and one nights*, it seems justified to say that this narrative characterization of Harun al-Rashid was consciously used to comment on power relations as imposed by the framing stories on the embedded stories, strengthening the idea that narration and imagination are an integral part of discourses of power and their critique. This conclusion is supported by the way in which narration and imagination have their roles in the stories themselves, hiding and ultimately revealing an underlying reality containing

the rationale of events and enabling the ruler to exert his authority in a rational and just way. The suspension of disbelief, in its various appearances, seems to be indispensable first to deconstruct claims to authority, but ultimately to preserve them. This is a dualism inherent in the nature of power, as it is in the negotiations between women and men.

If we compare the cycle of Harun al-Rashid with the cycles of the *Seven viziers* and the Sanskrit cycles, we can hardly avoid the impression that they are part of a single tradition. This tradition combines instructions for the prince with storytelling and has a preference for the frame story as a narrative structure to link the different levels of the narrative. In all cases the reader is gradually introduced to idealized forms of kingship, either in the form of an abstract king-protagonist, or as an abstraction of a historical or legendary figure. Vikramaditya and Harun al-Rashid have become stereotypes representing the values inherent in good rulership, deriving their status both from the traditional conventions and their own personal intervention in the affairs of the empire. They both attain the culmination of good kingship: they are prepared to sacrifice their lives in order to save the lives of their subjects or to avert the evil intentions of demons. The common motif of the inspection of the conditions of the subjects in some kind of disguise, with the aim of gaining objective, unmediated, and unprejudiced knowledge about the situation of the empire, is a significant feature of both cycles. This fictional element provides the discursive link between the high status of the king/caliph and the common people, making possible the acceptance of the extraordinary position of the king/caliph among the people. It also displays the two components of the king, as an institution bound to formal rules, and as a person driven by his impulses and moral inclinations.

A remarkable topos in the various cycles is the motif of silence. In the cycle of the *Seven viziers* the prince was not allowed to speak for ten days to avoid certain death. In that stretch of time the viziers exhibited their wisdom and the prince completed his transition to a fully grown ruler. This suggests that there is a taboo on speech within the transition ritual, necessitating the explication of the discursive field surrounding the process of succession to the throne: The conventions and threats are reiterated, even resuscitated and conjured to re-institutionalize the principles of government as dissociated from the 'subjective' influence of the ruler *in spe*. The prince is not an actor in the process, but rather an object that has to be moulded and fitted into the system. It is the silence of the prince, imposed by the macrocosmic forces, that obliges the other protagonists to speak.

In the Sanskrit cycles the motif is also related to esoteric knowledge, contemplation, and the realm of the gods and his sages. Here, too, speaking is taboo,

a desired 'object', because it contains and hides some indispensable wisdom needed for earthly harmony, and here, too, the taboo is violated by the contamination of the 'pure' state of silence with the lure of carnal pleasure and feminine perfidy. It is women who pose the greatest challenge to sacred forms of silence and who represent the element of profanity and indulgence in material/physical pleasures at the expense of spiritual or mental well-being and correctness. In the Harun al-Rashid cycle, in the story of the 'Three ladies of Baghdad', we again encounter the ban on speech, at the risk of execution, which leads to a bizarre, incomprehensible spectacle. Harun al-Rashid is not allowed to ask questions, but when he cannot contain his curiosity and speaks, he is 'punished' only by the obligation to tell his life-story. Here, as in the other cases, the resolution of the taboo on speech is achieved by narration in various forms, by telling stories that both contain and convey hidden wisdom and hidden explanations. Silence represents a stalemate, whereas narration indicates movement and continuity, both by exhibiting certain topics and by establishing a process of communication.

Fighting the Evil Spirit: *Creation of the Gods*

The stories of Vikramaditya and Harun al-Rashid show that kingship is intimately related to forces in the supernatural realm, in the form of demons, magical objects, and spells, and that the legitimation of kingship is partly derived from the prince's ability to bring harmony to the relationship between these forces and the population of the empire. This process is not governed by the king himself, but is dependent on the more powerful will of God, in His various guises, which finds expression in fate. This complex process is perhaps most intricately imagined in the Chinese tradition, which developed a dynamic vision of the all-encompassing interrelationships between human life and the cosmic forces, represented by a vast array of gods, spirits, demons, immortals, proto-immortals, etc., each with specific functions, abilities, and authority. Life on earth is permanently in contact with the realm of the supernatural, which time and again intervenes to fulfil the directives of fate and to preserve the balance of forces that regulates both realms. This vision is, of course, taken mainly from the imaginative mythologies of Taoism and Buddhism.

The rich representations of the supernatural realm are most vividly described in the Chinese literary tradition and more specifically in several great novels that appeared from the sixteenth century onwards. Most of these novels and romances were based on accounts of historical figures and episodes, which were enriched by popular lore and spurious material accumulated in the liter-

ary tradition. Some of these novels are more realistic than others; some clearly indulged in supernatural extravaganza, while others were more restrained. In most cases, however, the stories were in one way or another connected with rulership and the position of the ruler within the complex interaction between the human and celestial realms. As we have seen in *The expedition of King Wu*, a sudden turn of history can be attributed to some supernatural intervention that affects the smooth operation of the apparatus of government. This novel also shows how the functioning of the state is dependent on the attitudes of the ministers and their moral courage.

In our discussion of *The expedition of King Wu* we have focused mainly on the role of women as catalysts of the dramatic intrigue, and the role of the ministers. We will conclude this section on kingship, demons, and gods with a brief analysis of the dénouement of this story, in which the destructive interference of Daiji is repressed. In the short account of this story in *The expedition of King Wu* this episode is summarized rather than expounded in detail, but it is much more elaborately narrated in a novel of the seventeenth century entitled *Creation of the gods*.[19] This novel is based on the same story as *The expedition of King Wu*, and it follows the chronology of the scenes of the account quite accurately. However, here the various scenes and intrigues are much more elaborately described and enacted, to heighten the dramatic effect and to make full use of the potential of fictional narration. As a result, whereas *The expedition of King Wu* numbers about sixty pages in the English translation, the novel *Creation of the gods* numbers about nine hundred. In contrast to the shorter version, in the elaborate version the struggle to eliminate the emperor and his evil concubine is related in great detail.

Apart from the extensive descriptions of the battles between the armies of Emperor Zhou and his opponent King Wu, the episode of the expedition provides interesting information about the visions of rulership, which are enclosed in the narrative logic and explicated especially at the end. These visions are related to the figure of Jiang Ziya, a seemingly common person who, however, possesses supernatural powers and is in touch with the immortals. He lives as a good-for-nothing for some time, until his prognostic talents are discovered and he is invited to the court of the emperor. When he receives the assignment to construct a sumptuous palace in a very short time, he flees court and settles in the province as a humble fisherman. One day he is 'discovered' as the person who is predestined to join King Wu's army and lead it to victory. After he is led before King Wu and appointed as his chief minister, he assumes

19 *Creation of the Gods*, trans. Gu Zhizhong, 2 vols. (Beijing, 1992).

his task as the commander of the rebellious army, making use of his miraculous powers.

The war between the armies of the emperor and King Wu is apparently conducted by normal human soldiers, but the actual battles are fought with extraordinary means. Some of the great warriors are equipped with magical weapons, which enable them to capture even the strongest enemies. The battles are decided not only by physical strength and tactical acumen, but most often by the magical powers of the heroes on the two sides. The generals of the two armies enlist the help of various holy figures and immortals who support their cause and who use their powers against equally miraculous opponents. The war is thus depicted as a struggle between earthly and human parties, which are inextricably linked to their counterparts in the supernatural realm, from whom the outcome in the end depends. The war is a manifestation of a much greater struggle of celestial elements who strive to determine the course and effectuation of fate, which finds its manifestation in the new constellation on earth. The war is not just a fight on two fronts, earthly and celestial; it involves an inseparable combination of human and celestial efforts to foster the fulfilment of destiny.

It is Jiang Ziya who is capable of mobilizing and combining the many components of the struggle, like a conductor of a huge and diverse orchestra, which demands all his ingenuity and strength of will. It is also Jiang Ziya who comprehends the nature and the many dimensions of the struggle, and its connection with the celestial forces. When he is asked by a general how he can be so ungrateful as to rebel against the emperor, he answers:

> You've got it all wrong, General! It's often said that 'The kingdom does not belong to one person; it's owned by all.' The will of Heaven is subject to change, and it always favors the virtuous. In ancient times, Yao offered his throne to Shun, Shun to Yu, and Yu to his descendants. His last successor, however, lost the Xia Dynasty, and the founder of the new was favoured by Heaven for his great virtue. It's hard to imagine that his descendant, Zhou, is so wicked. Heaven has abandoned him, and the people hate him. We have come as a united front to save the people in distress. We will carry out punishment as Heaven has willed. We cannot recognize him as a king.[20]

20 Ibid., vol. 2, 415.

This appeal to the will of Heaven, as the manifestation of destiny, is supported by the people, who agree that the tyrant should be brought down. Jiang Ziya confirms that it is the duty of a king to rule the people by Constitution according to the will of Heaven, caring for his subjects as a father for his children.

The question of Jiang Ziya's position and self-justification is, of course, connected with the behavioural code of the minister, who owes loyalty to the emperor. However, the novel is quite clear about the proper conduct in these circumstances: The king has estranged the good ministers from the administration; he has 'appointed bootlickers, ruined ethical relationships and disdained virtue'. Loyal ministers are the 'trunk and branches' of the nation, but the king has maltreated them and 'severed the ethical relationship between a king and his ministers'.[21] This behaviour resulted in a loss of honesty, which is the 'foundation of human existence' and 'the most powerful weapon a king needs to rule his nation';[22] in the unjust application of the law; and in extravagant expenses and the squandering of natural resources and national wealth. Jiang Ziya: 'Since ancient times no ruler living in extravagance has been able to keep his dynasty from destruction. The saints have warned us over and over again. We must treasure virtue rather than pearls or jade.'[23] It is the connection with virtue that is the essence of kingship. Still, in spite of Zhou's obvious abuses, King Wu is reluctant to let ministers fight directly against the emperor, as this would be contrary to the code of proper conduct. In the end Zhou commits suicide by setting the palace aflame with himself in it.

The dilemma of the justification of revolt, linked to the inevitability of fate, is raised again when Daiji is finally captured. The clever fox-spirit, in her anguish, argues that: 'we've done our best to ruin the Shang Dynasty. How can you be ungrateful?'[24] Of course, the immortal Nü Wa, who holds her captive, cannot deny that she has been a quite efficient instrument of fate, speeding up the coming of a new era. However, he retorts: 'I sent you to help King Zhou lose his kingdom; it was just as fate had destined. But you were too cruel and ruthless. You murdered so many loyal ministers and innocent people. Your crimes are too great and you must be dealt with according to the law.'[25] This brief conversation nicely sums up the dilemma embedded in the Chinese vision of the macrocosmic and microcosmic mechanisms: Every creature has

21 Ibid., 423.
22 Ibid.
23 Ibid., 444.
24 Ibid., 432.
25 Ibid.

his or her role in the realization of fate, but each has his or her own capacities, powers, functions, and responsibilities; and, it seems, within these restrictions each has the possibility to make moral choices, to execute the tasks assigned to him or her either according to moral premises or according to his or her particular, vicious inclinations. Overall, events are predestined and determined by fate, but since almost nobody knows the outcome, there remains a vast space in which each creature has to play his or her part to realize his or her individual fate and contribute to the destiny of the universe as a whole.

Within these mechanisms, virtue is a major constituent force. This vital asset has now, in this turbulent period, accumulated in King Wu, who is so mild-hearted, even diffident, that he is rather ineffectual in the struggle, which is totally controlled by Jiang Ziya. He wants to spare all the mean enemies, he wants to keep up decorum in spite of the complete implosion of the system, and he is almost over-compassionate. In the end, when the enemy is defeated, he almost spoils everything by refusing to occupy the now vacant throne, out of sheer politeness. Only after the people have pledged their support and the minister has argued 'You will have failed in your original intention to save the people from distress, and instead of peace and happiness, they will only suffer more',[26] can Wu be persuaded to become emperor. Subsequently, the organization of the empire is rearranged: all provinces are assigned to the good and loyal notables, according to their various ranks, and the forefathers of Wu are retrospectively raised to the status of emperor. Jiang Ziya is officially sworn in as the head of all the dukes, holding the yellow axe and the white sceptre.

After this thorough reorganization of the empire, only one task remains: the deification of those who have fallen in the struggle for the just cause:

> As fate had destined, many fairies and ordinary generals were killed along the way. Before we left, we put the List of Creations in the Terrace of Creation, but now the souls of the deceased need a fixed place to stay. So I must ask leave from you to go to Mount Kunlun to see my master. I will ask him for the jade spells, seal, and golden-leaf booklet, so that I may deify the deceased upon my return.[27]

Jiang Ziya travels to the Jade Emptiness Palace to request permission for the deification from the Heavenly Primogenitor, which is granted without objection. A long list is given of the new deities, spirits, and immortals, with their

26 Ibid., 446.

27 Ibid., 453.

tasks indicated, to complete the reorganization of the heavenly realm, which complements the change of dynasty on earth.

A historical transition is now concluded, which had set in with the dream of the emperor and the penetration of a fox-spirit into the heart of the empire corrupting the emperor and concomitantly corrupting the functioning of the state. Only after the intruder has been eliminated can order be restored by a far-reaching purification of the administrative apparatus and the substitution of the immoral emperor. This can be achieved only by a person who embodies virtue and who is supported by the celestial framework and the mechanisms of destiny. And, of course, by the indispensable help of an extremely gifted minister.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter we have become acquainted with three exemplary (semi-)historical rulers, Vikramaditya, Harun al-Rashid, and Wu, who are situated in the core of fictional narrative corpuses that structure representations and discourse of authority. They are all three presented as model rulers whose power is partly derived from their ability to exorcise demons and spells that have penetrated into the lives of the common subjects, making them miserable or holding them imprisoned in some kind of enchantment. This ability is not derived from their inherent power or particular abilities, but rather from their identification with the divine schemes and the effectuation of fate. Their privileged position and their special relationship with the Divine are based not on force, but rather on virtuousness and justice. Moreover, they are sent by Providence not to embody earthly glory or even celestial magnificence, but rather to humbly serve the interests of the populace and to remedy their suffering. They owe their illustrious place in history to this ability, rather than to military prowess or royal splendour.

It is remarkable that none of these kings is represented as a monolithic, heroic, symbol of power. Although they are idealized and provided with extraordinary talents, they are reluctant to transform these talents into power, and prefer to display justice, comprehension, ingenuity, and clemency. To some extent they are anti-heroes, who have reached their positions despite themselves, as if forced by irresistible forces to assume their responsibilities. They are also all three helped by formidable ministers, who represent the pragmatic and executive component of power supplementing the symbolic and moral power of the king. Whereas the king represents the 'soft' ingredients of kingship, the ministers personify the active and 'hard' ingredients, producing an

efficient mixture of power and legitimacy. This confirms the idea that authority is presented as being inevitably composite, as we have seen in Chapter One as well. Authority is vested not in one person only; it is construed upon a dialogic situation that includes several parties, and upon the two main components of the figure of the king.

The texts treated in this chapter show formal and conceptual similarities with the texts analysed in Chapter One. The thematic contrasting of silence and narration, the use of frames, and the serializing of exemplary tales are procedures used in various narratives. But we also find recurrent motifs, such as dissimulation, the central role of women in the fictional intrigue, disguise, the appeals by ministers, etc. These narrative elements and strategies all serve to destabilize the monolithic discourse of power, indicating that authority is inherently complex, based on both heavenly support and human endeavour, and embodied by princes who are not confined to their elevated, symbolic, persona, but also have more common *alter egos*. The conjuring of demonic forces is a test, not only of their courage and strength, but primarily to show their compassion and self-sacrifice. They may derive their authority from the Divine, but it is granted to them for their willingness to serve the people, whose condition measures the quality of rulership.

CHAPTER 3

Divine Insights, Cosmic Harmony

All the texts examined so far are in some way concerned with trajectories of initiation. Since kingship and administration are related to celestial forces, truths accumulated in the tradition, and insight into fundamental principles, it is inevitable that the prince is not only generally educated, but more specifically initiated into the secrets of his status, to prepare him for his future task. But not only princes should be alerted to their place within the configuration of the world and the cosmos, kings, too, should be reminded of their responsibility, and viziers and ministers can function satisfactorily only when they are endowed with supreme insight and intuition. Even if the basis of correct rule is rationality and justice, this rationality is not just invented in the human mind; it is a constitutive principle of Creation and derived from the fundamental framework of religion. Insight is thus often related to revelatory experiences, epiphanies, and the exploration of secret realms. As the examples in the previous chapters show, there is no knowledge without insight, no ability without recourse to a supernatural order.

As we have seen in the different kinds of texts discussed above, this initiation is not an isolated phase in which the prince or the vizier is instructed, and in which some form of 'secret' knowledge is instilled in the prince; it is simultaneously a phase in which the prince is confronted with the occurrence of evil, supernatural forces, which threaten the harmony of human life on earth and aim to counter God's intentions. Besides representing the divine scheme, the king has to subdue the forces undermining it in the form of spells, magical interventions, and, more generally, the whims of supernatural creatures. To establish order the prince has to conjure and control the forces conspiring to subvert it. The ability to do this and the susceptibility to receive the required initiation are, of course, not given to just anyone, but are strictly reserved for a chosen few. They belong to the prerogatives and tasks of the 'true', authentic king, chosen by God to represent him on earth.

In this chapter we will analyse three texts that illustrate the relationship between rulership, both of the king and his minister, and divinely inspired insight and esoteric knowledge, and the ways in which these are embedded in concepts of social and cosmic harmony. The narratives show procedures of initiation, the conjuring of evil forces, and the idea of chosenness in various forms, referring to different conceptualizations of the universe and its relationship to the human realm. To a certain extent, the theme of this chapter is a continua-

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_005
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

tion of the main themes of the two previous chapters, in the sense that it will show other facets of the relationship between kingship and the Divine, while it elaborates on the notion of initiation, which was already discussed with regard to the *Seven viziers*. The combination of the revelatory aspects of the Divine with the process of initiation emphasizes the ritual aspect of the ascent to kingship, as it is shaped in the narrative components of the discourse of authority.

The Cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents'

Although the *Thousand and one nights* contains many stories that revolve around magic, jinns, and supernatural phenomena, it does not include many stories that deal more specifically with forms of esoteric knowledge. A narrative that stands out in this respect is the cycle of the 'Queen of the serpents', which even for *Thousand and one nights* standards is rather eccentric and complex.[1] The cycle was probably never part of an 'original' version of the *Nights*, if it ever existed, but was presumably added in the eighteenth-century versions. The cycle is complex first of all because it consists of three rather diverse components: a framing story that relates the adventures of Hasib Karim al-Din, his initiation into esoteric knowledge and his becoming a vizier; an embedded story that presents the misadventures of Buluqiya, who, as a king, goes in search of divine/prophetic inspiration; and, contained in 'Buluqiya', the story of 'Janshah', his love for Shamsa, and his journey through the realm of Sulayman. These three stories are joined in several versions of the cycle, which indicates that they were somehow considered to be related in a generic or thematic sense. The story of Buluqiya can also be found separately in various collections of the 'stories of the prophets' (*qisas al-anbiya*), in which eschatological stories and prophets' lives are transmitted.

The stories are complex, too, as we shall see, because they contain motifs and material that are deeply rooted in the Middle Eastern/Asian narrative tradition and that show intriguing patterns of transmission. Some of the motifs, and perhaps whole parts of the stories, may go back to ancient times—Mesopotamia, Greece—but surviving manuscripts show that they were certainly current in the fifteenth to eighteenth centuries in the Ottoman Empire, either as a cycle or as separate tales. The story of 'Buluqiya', for instance, is included in al-Tha'alabi's collection of prophets' stories (eleventh century C.E.), where it is

1 For a summary of the story and references, see: Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*.

classified as part of the material from Jewish sources, the 'Isra'iliyyat'; there also exists a Spanish version, and in Turkish it is found in various versions from the fifteenth century, and it is preserved in an African version as well; it is mentioned as a commonly known tale in an Ottoman travel account of the fifteenth century; and it is found in the story collections by the French 'jeunes de langues', who studied Oriental languages in Istanbul in the seventeenth/eighteenth centuries. It is also incorporated in Dom Chavis's compilation of the *Thousand and one nights*, translated by Cazotte. Another Arabic version is incorporated in a manuscript from the sixteenth century.[2]

It is convenient to begin our discussion with the story of 'Buluqiya' and then examine its thematic links to the framing tale of the 'Queen of the serpents'. The contents of the story are briefly as follows: Buluqiya, the son of a Jewish sage and king of Egypt, ascends the throne after his father's death. In the treasury he finds an ebony chest containing a document that relates the life of the Prophet Muhammad. Elated, Buluqiya decides to set out on a journey in search of Muhammad. In Jerusalem he meets the sage Affan, who tells him that they should travel to the tomb of Sulayman (Solomon) to obtain his ring, which will give the owner not only the authority over all living creatures, but also allow him to go to the Fountain of Life. There Buluqiya will acquire enough lifespan to encounter the Prophet in the distant future. In order to be able to reach Sulayman's grave, however, they have to find the Queen of the serpents—mistress of the snakes of hell—who can give them a magical herb enabling them to cross the seven seas. When they finally reach the tomb of Sulayman and try to steal the ring, Affan is killed by the serpent guarding he tomb. Buluqiya is miraculously saved by the archangel Jibril (Gabriel).

In the second part of the story, Buluqiya roams seas and islands where he witnesses the wonders of the world. He visits warring jinn tribes and their kings and is shown the mechanisms of the cosmos by the angels responsible for the alternation of night and day, earthquakes, war, and prosperity. The angels on Mount Qaf, the mountains surrounding the inhabited world, explain to him the regions of the cosmos and the enormous cosmic beast carrying it. Continuing his journey, he meets a young man weeping beside a grave. It is Janshah, who

2 Jorge Pascual Asensi, 'Tras los "signos de la profecía": a propósito de las fuentes ideológicas y literarias del *Fecho de Buluqiya* y su pervivencia en la literatura piadosa de los moriscos', *Sharq al-Andalus* 18 (2003–2007) 173–201; Victor Chauvin, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes* (Liège and Leipzig, 1903) vol. 7; Comte de Caylus, *Contes*, Julie Bloch, ed. (Paris, 2005); Jacques Cazotte, *La Suite des Mille et une Nuits*, Raymonde Robert, ed. (Paris, 2012); *La docte Sympathie: Tawaddud al-Jâriya. Conte des 1001 Nuits—version de Tombouctou* (Paris, 2015).

tells him the story of his misfortune.[3] Finally, Buluqiya arrives at a paradisiacal island where he is picked up by the saint al-Khadir (al-Khidr), who takes him home, where he resumes his kingship.

The story of Buluqiya belongs to the genre of the 'stories of the prophets', which assembles not only the life stories of the Muslim prophets, but also, usually, accounts of an eschatological nature, visions of heaven and hell, and the adventures of the jinn. It is not part of the revelation, but it provides the narrative material surrounding figures and events referred to in the Qur'an, as a kind of supplementary mythology. The provenance of the stories is usually biblical stories, Jewish traditions, and Arabic lore. The material was gathered in the centuries after Muhammad and recorded in written collections, within works of Qur'anic exegesis, and oral circuits. It subsequently found its way into folklore and fictional literature of various kinds, especially tales of magic and jinns, which are often, partly, situated in a realm outside, but penetrating, the common human world. These tales are usually not perceived as 'high-brow' literature, but rather as fanciful trivialities meant to entertain the audience. 'Buluqiya' is different, however, because it has preserved its association with the 'stories of the prophets' genre in spite of its incorporation into the more frivolous corpus of the *Thousand and one nights*.

Most scholars place the story of Buluqiya among the eschatological narratives transmitted within the Jewish tradition but ultimately going back to motifs from the Mesopotamian tradition, such as the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. An element that indicates Mesopotamian origin is the document found hidden in a casket that contains some secret wisdom. Moreover, from ancient times the Israelites are portrayed as the guardians and transmitters of the esoteric and magical sciences. In the case of 'Buluqiya', this ancient material was adapted to suit the Islamic environment, by introducing the Prophet Muhammad and accommodating the supernatural phenomena to the Qur'anic vision of the universe. In this sense, it resembles the story of Tamim al-Dari, another Arabic anti-hero, who leaves his home to visit the wondrous realms of creation only to return after many years have passed. That these stories were current among the Ottoman elite in the sixteenth century is attested to by the travel account of Piri Reis, who, after being shipwrecked on the Indian coast, undertook a hazardous journey to return home. When the famous sea captain relates the events of his adventurous journey to the governor of Amid, in Anatolia, the latter remarks: 'It is like the stories of Temim Addari, Belkiyya and Janshah!'[4]

---

3 The story of 'Janshah' will be discussed in Chapter Five.

4 Seyyidî Alî Re'îs, *Le Miroir des pays. Una anabase ottomane à travers l'Inde et l'Asie cen-*

The basic form of the story of 'Buluqiya', stripped of its contexts of cultural roots and framework, is a journey of initiation, with its narrative devices, such as a succession to the throne, the prince's departure from home, his crossing several metaphorical/geographical boundaries, and the conveying of new, instructive, knowledge. Helped by a sage, and later by angels, Buluqiya is gradually introduced to a segment of the universe normally outside human perception in which the natural forces are structured and regulated. Buluqiya's education comes not only from his visits to exotic, mysterious realms, such as the many marvellous islands, Mount Qaf, and the world of the jinns; his instruction includes the forces of nature and the cosmic setup. All these elements belong to the realm governed by Sulayman, who is the king of the (super)natural world and the key figure of the story, giving access to the treasury of secret knowledge. It is, in the end, a world of wisdom and knowledge, which Buluqiya acquires through both visual observation and descriptive accounts and which gives him insight superior to that of other men.

The perspective of the story is completely changed by the incorporation of Muhammad. Whereas the central figure in the story is Sulayman, who is, however, deceased and therefore relegated to the past, although his powers remain in full force, the dominating figure of the future is Muhammad, who is retroactively projected into the past. As we will see below, conversion to Islam before the advent of Muhammad, and thus before the actual revelation of the Qur'an, is a topos recurring in Arabic romances of chivalry. The hero catches a glimpse of God's truth and begins to act according to His will, even before it is disclosed to man. This shows that even before Muhammad's birth, the world was designed and ordered according to God's plan, centred around the many successive prophetic figures, such as Ibrahim, Musa, Sulayman, and Jesus. The pre-revelation heroes of the stories all strive fervently to refurbish the world to prepare the way for the prophet. Buluqiya's awareness of Muhammed reveals the prophet as an instrument of God to finalize the creation of the world and mobilize the forces of good in order to fulfil God's scheme. At some level, past, present, and future interact outside the reach of man, who is imprisoned in his lifetime but can achieve a deeper knowledge of reality.

The incorporation of Muhammad into the story is, of course, intended as a means to link the message of Islam to the ancient cosmological traditions and to situate the prophet in a single, continuous tradition of wisdom and revelation. Buluqiya conquers a specific place in this tradition, but his abilities

---

trale, trans. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (Arles, 1999) 130 (my translation from the French translation).

are limited. His ambitions come close to hubris, as is shown by the figure of Affan, who is a sage seeking power over the natural forces by appropriating Sulayman's ring. He is killed for his audacity, but Buluqiya is saved because his intentions are impeccable, and he is allowed to acquire a share of secret knowledge. However, he ultimately fails to realize his aim, that is, meeting Muhammad, because he is bound to his time and has not been chosen to become a prophet himself. His role is to use his superior knowledge in the exercise of his royal authority and to thereby foster the effectuation of God's grand design. Although at some level this design is already realized, where time forms a unity and past and future converge, on the human level it is constructed step by step, confined by the limitations of time and place, and embodied by the personal role of each individual actor.

The esoteric purport of the story of Buluqiya is reinforced by its connection with the two other stories with which it forms a separate cycle. Although the confluence of these stories, at least in some versions, strengthens its message, it probably also marks the transition of the narrative material from a prophetic tale into a fictional frame, thereby changing not only its narrative form, its generic framework, and its interpretative perspective, but also its audience and the media by which it was conveyed; in short, it facilitated the transference of the narrative from the 'stories of the prophets' to the *Thousand and one nights* and Ottoman story collections, and perhaps circuits of oral storytelling as well. The story not only becomes part of the religious mythology supplementing the Qur'an, but also of the collective, even popular, imagination, amalgamating religious with popular lore. This combination is notably represented by the story of 'Janshah', which contains long episodes set in Solomonic realms, but which ultimately turns out to be a love romance, albeit between a man and a *jinniyya*. We will discuss this story more elaborately below, in our chapter on kingship and love (Chapter Five).

The narrative element that complements and amplifies the significance of the story of 'Buluqiya' most adequately, within the cycle of the 'Queen of the serpents' is the story of 'Hasib Karim al-Din'. This story not only serves as a frame for 'Buluqiya', it also adds to its esoteric nature and its interpretative potential. The story of 'Hasib Karim al-Din' is roughly as follows: A Greek sage named Danyal loses all his work in a shipwreck, except for five pages stored in a box. After his death, his wife gives birth to their son, Hasib Karim al-Din, who grows up as a lazy good-for-nothing, unable and unwilling to learn anything. To provide some income, he joins a group of woodcutters. One day, in the forest, the group seeks shelter in a cave, and Hasib falls into a subterranean crypt filled with honey. His comrades collect the honey, which he hands over to them, and subsequently abandon him, imprisoned, in the crypt. Hasib succeeds in finding

an exit at the other end of the crypt, where he arrives at a large lake surrounded by a golden throne and 12,000 silver chairs. He falls asleep and is awakened by the hissing of a large number of snakes approaching him. A great snake carries a plate with a small snake with the face of a woman: Yamlikha, the Queen of the serpents. The Queen tells Hasib the story of Buluqiya and also about her meeting with him and the story he told her about Janshah.

During the account of the Serpent Queen, Hasib repeatedly asks her to release him and let him return to the human world. In the end the Serpent Queen agrees to do so, but only after Hasib has promised never to enter a bathhouse in the future, since this will cause her death. After the Serpent Queen has finished her story, she finally lets Hasib return to the surface of the world through a deserted well. Sometime later, Hasib is seduced by his friends to go to a bathhouse, in spite of his promise. There he is suddenly arrested by slave-soldiers, who see that his body is covered with black spots. They take him to the palace of the king, who is gravely ill and who has heard that the Serpent Queen will provide him with medicine and that Hasib can bring her to him. With some reluctance, Hasib leads the wicked vizier of the king to the well and the Serpent Queen appears. She instructs Hasib in secret to cut her body into three pieces, boil one part of the meat and pour the broth into two phials. The vizier will ask him to drink from the first phial, but he should drink only from the second phial and offer the first one to the vizier. After this has been done, the vizier drinks from the first phial, swells up and dies; Hasib, who drinks from the second phial as instructed is suddenly struck by a strange perspicacity: He has insight into all sciences, mineralogy, medicine, chemistry, the art of making gold and silver, astrology, alchemy, natural magic, the Cabbala, and Spiritism. The king is cured by the medicine and appoints Hasib as his new vizier. Hasib now reads the five pages left to him by his father.

It is clear that the story of Hasib Karim al-Din and the Queen of the Serpents—curious even by *Thousand and one nights* standards—is rich in references to ancient narrative material. Here, again, we meet the ancient Mesopotamian motif of the lost wisdom, part of which is saved and kept in a box by a Greek/Jewish guardian/sage. The motifs of the snake and the cave connected with trees also reflect Mesopotamian stories. As we have argued elsewhere,[5] the story also seems to be part of the Neoplatonist tradition that was transmitted to Arabic and Persian philosophy through the cults of Harran, the translation of works by Porphyry, Pythagoras, and Iamblichus, and the philosophies of al-Razi (865–925) and al-Suhrawardi (1154–1191). This connection is sustained mainly

5 Van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights*.

by the complex motif of the cave, the honey, and the lake as a transitory space from the human realm to a subterranean, supernatural realm. This motif can also be found in Homer's *Odyssey*, as the cave of the Naiads, and it is discussed by Porphyry (c. 234–305 C.E.) in his treatise *On the cave of the nymphs*. This hypothesis of a connection between these texts is strengthened by the fact that the Serpent Queen's name is Yamlikha, which is the Arabic form of Iamblichus, the Neoplatonist philosopher (c. 250–330 C.E.). Intriguingly, the motif of a cave with a double exit haunted by bees and snakes can also be found in the novel 'A Babylonian story', written by a writer who is also named Iamblichus, who lived in the second century CE.

Apart from the name Iamblichus, a Neoplatonist interpretation of the story is supported by the context. A Neoplatonist element, for instance, may be the taboo on bathhouses, which can be found within Pythagorean esotericism as well. But more convincingly, the story echoes the debate between Porphyry and Iamblichus about the theurgical potential of ritual. In his treatise on the cave of the Naiads, Porphyry discusses the cave as an esoteric metaphor for the transition from the human to the divine world, the cave being the locus where secret knowledge is stored and where earthly, material possessions are given up and exchanged against divine insight. In another treatise, Porphyry discussed the possibility of eating animal flesh as part of esoteric ritual. The treatise was directed against Iamblichus, who held that it was possible for humans to influence the spiritual realm by rituals, and even to reach a state of illumination, of half-divinity. In contrast to Porphyry, Iamblichus did not exclude the sacrificing and consumption of animal flesh as part of these rituals. It was especially these theurgical theories of Iamblichus that were popular in Harran in Islamic times. It seems that Iamblichus and Porphyry are the key figures of this line of interpretation, as evidenced by several motifs: the motif of the cave as a boundary between two realms; the ritual sacrificing of the flesh of the Serpent Queen; the renouncing of material possessions (honey); the figure of Hasib Karim al-Din as chosen by destiny; and the final state of insight and illumination. All these motifs neatly conform to the Neoplatonist views of life, the world, and the universe.[6]

But this is not all that can be said about the potential sources of the story. There seems to be a Persian trajectory as well, as is indicated first of all by

6 See about Iamblichus, Porphyry and Neoplatonism: Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA, 1995); Michel Tardieu, 'Sabiens coraniques et "Sabiens" de Harran', *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986) 1–44; Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry*, Thomas Taylor, ed. (London, 1823); Iamblichus' novel in: B.P. Reardon, ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley, 1989).

the fact that in several versions of the 'Queen of the Serpents', the hero is not called Hasib Karim al-Din, but Jamasp. The name Hasib may even be a corruption of Jamasp, as both names have virtually the same consonants in non-vocalized and undifferentiated Arabic script. Jamasp was a legendary Persian sage, the main prophet/philosopher after Zoroaster, who was famous for his knowledge of the secret sciences such as astrology, alchemy, and geomancy. He is associated with the apocalyptic work 'Jamaspnama', which recurs in the literary tradition as a compendium of religious and esoteric knowledge. Fleischer describes a manuscript titled 'Jamaspnama' that contains an Ottoman-Turkish version of the cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents', including the stories of Hasib Karim al-Din/Jamasp, Buluqiya and Janshah. According to Fleischer, this text, which roughly follows the *Thousand and one nights* version, is a translation of a Persian version, made in 1429–1430.[7] Several Turkish versions of this text from the subsequent centuries have been preserved. Another Turkish text containing the motif of Yamlikha as King/Queen of the serpents is the epic romance of Sayyid Battal, which could be as old as the eleventh to thirteenth centuries, but which seems to be more convincingly a romance describing the Ottoman struggle against the Byzantines in the fifteenth century (see Chapter Four).

This evidence may perhaps point not to a Persian origin of the story, but certainly to an eastern 'branch' of it. An Arabic version dating from the sixteenth century also has Jamasp as its hero. This manuscript is part of a collection titled *Makhtuta Taymuriyya*, which may reflect an Oriental origin of the material, perhaps even its provenance from the Timurid lore on its westward journey. Jean-Claude Garcin, mentioned above, has surmised a connection between narrative material in Arabic, and more specifically in the later versions of the *Thousand and one nights*, and the return of Arabic literati from the Timurid court at the beginning of the fifteenth century. Another remarkable element is the reference to a pavilion with two exits in the Hindi romance *Madhumalati* (sixteenth century; see Chapter Five). Here some young maidens playing in a garden are attacked by bees and flee into a pavilion that contains marvellous images of the world. They leave the pavilion at the other side, 're-born' in another state of mind. Could it be that the whole motif-complex of the cave, the honey, and the serpent—or parts of it—is derived from Indian examples?[8]

---

7 H.L. Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften. Gesammelt, durchgesehen und vermehrt* (Osnabrück, 1968) vol. 3, XVa; XVb; XVI, 226–260.

8 Heinz Grotzfeld and Sophia Grotzfeld, *Die Erzählungen aus 'Tausendundeiner Nacht'* (Darmstadt, 1984); Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*; Manjhan, *Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance*, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (Oxford, 2000).

And how would it relate to a Neoplatonic interpretation? We will have to wait for new evidence to answer these intriguing questions.

The speculations above about the origin and trajectory of the story of the 'Queen of the Serpents' do not result in a clear pattern of transmission. They do show, however, how persistent literary motifs can be within trajectories of transmission over long stretches of time and space. These trajectories were certainly influenced by the political frameworks in which they evolved, but they also possessed their own dynamics and force, enabling them to become incorporated into new narrative embeddings and be endowed with new, added meanings. It is not without significance that these 'memes' survived from ancient times until the eighteenth century, when they were incorporated into the *Thousand and one nights* and became part of its 'modern' tradition, being translated into a European language for the first time in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The cycle reveals the complex background of the Ottoman literary/cultural imagination, its function as a repository of various cultural influences and literary material, and its role as a bridge between Asia and Europe.

But what do these stories tell us about visions of kingship? First of all, we find the familiar basic elements of narration and dialogism: instruction and initiation take place through narration, through the conveying of knowledge to a 'prince', making use of a combination of texts of different generic types; second, the dramatization takes off from a potential break, the loss of knowledge and the perdition of the kingdom, which is associated with the motif of silence; third, the prince is chosen by destiny to perform his role; he is driven towards his itinerary, he is surrounded by taboos and evil forces, but he is in the end the one who assimilates insights that have been pre-ordained for him from the beginning; fourth, the initiation can be compared to a revelation, an awareness of a divine nature is granted to the prince that gives him insight into the secrets of the universe; fifth, the initiation of the prince is quite elaborately linked to the tradition of wisdom and knowledge, reaching back to ancient times, but it is also related to a new, religious, phase in history, heralded by the advent of Muhammad. The roles of the prince and his knowledge are ultimately part of God's scheme to transform the world according to His plan, using the characters in the story as actors to foster this process and, at the same time, as media spreading knowledge and insights about His universe. Finally, kings are far from common people; they are selected to perform their predestined roles and they are endowed with a superior form of insight and communication with a higher spiritual/religious realm. This insight implies a breach with the past, but also a new beginning, or at least a vision of the future. We will see this historical transition more prominently in our discussion of chivalric romances.

To conclude, it should be noted here that in the 'Queen of the serpents' the chosen initiate is not the king but his vizier, who, starting as a useless brat, turns out to enjoy the privilege of esoteric insight. This trope of the prodigiously insightful vizier is also found in the figure of Shimas and his son, and in the genie/vizier of Vikramaditya, in the *Twenty-five tales of the genie*, and, of course, in the figure of Jiang Ziya, in *Creation of the gods*. This does not mean that the vizier is superior to the king, but rather that he has a different role, and that his contribution is an essential component of kingship as a divinely given institution.

King and Cosmos: *The Sorcerer's Revolt*

The cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents' shows a literary representation of the links between kingship and rule and the cosmic forces determining human destinies. A similar pattern can be seen in a remarkable Chinese novel from the seventeenth century. This novel was compiled by the well-known author Feng Menglong (1574–1645), who probably made use of material from long-standing oral tradition. The book can be classified as a novel, but it contains a rich substratum of episodes depicting life and beliefs in Ming China adding plotlines to the already complex narrative. Unlike the story of the 'Queen of the Serpents', it is not an esoteric story; it rather displays the permanent interaction between the cosmic realm, esoteric knowledge and abilities, and common human life. As in the novel *Creation of the gods*, discussed above, whatever happens in the novel is related to some cosmic event, or *vice versa*, and esoteric knowledge, derived from Buddhist and Taoist teachings, serves as a medium to regulate (or deregulate) the interaction between the realms. But while it uninhibitedly indulges in celestial imaginings, the novel also portrays common society and common man.

The story begins by relating how Xuan Nyu, also called Mystery Girl, Dowager Queen of the Ninth Heaven and Teacher of the Realm in the martial arts, encounters Yuan Gong, a white ape versed in the teachings and lifestyle of Taoism, and how she takes him to the Yellow Emperor in the Ninth Heaven as her servant. The ape-god is assigned to guard the Mysterious and Marvellous Secret Books, containing knowledge that never reached human ears or eyes. Although the ape is not allowed to peek into the books without the permission of the Ministry of Cultural Affairs, one day, during the birthday celebrations of the upright Golden Mother of Western Heaven, Yuan Gong is left behind and, bored, starts to browse through the secret books. He finds a small, closed box, which he opens by invoking the help of Mystery Girl, while promising that he

will not use sorcery for evil purposes. In the box he finds the One Hundred and Eight Charms for the Transformation of Forms, the Thirty-Six Greater Transformations listed in accordance with the principles of divination by hot, dry winds of highest heavens, and the Seventy-Two Lesser Transformations, listed in accordance with divination by the cold, damp spirits of deepest Earth. And there is a marvellous formula for altering the course of the heavens and moving the Pole Star, miraculously useful in battering against ghosts and in harnessing spirits.

Pleased, Yuan Gong returns to White Cloud Cave on Mount Dream-of-the Clouds, his earthly abode, with this Concordance of the Will of Heaven, and carves the formulas on its walls. This is evidently a gross violation of Heaven's regulations, transferring secret knowledge to the earthly realm without permission of the Jade Emperor, while the 'hearts of men and women are not sufficiently righteous.'[9] Yuan Gong is brought before a Heavenly tribunal of the Royal Attendant of the Cultural Affairs Bureau and the Star Lords. He is accused of breaking the heavenly seals without authorization and stealing Heaven's secret Teachings. Yuan Gong defends himself: 'It is often said that the Emperor of Heaven is not selfish, so I didn't believe that he could have any secrets. If he did have secrets, they shouldn't have been written down. But as they are indeed written down, they should be transmitted throughout the ages. The Jade Emperor's storing them in a box and my carving them on the walls are one and the same thing.'[10] Furthermore, he claims to have obtained the permission of the Mystery Girl, because he succeeded in opening the box only after invoking her help. After writing his penitence and promising to make amends, Yuan Gong is allowed to leave and reform himself. The Emperor rescinds the death sentence but orders him to guard the White Cloud Cave solitarily; the title Lord of the White Cloud Cave is changed into White Ape God. A Magic Lamp of Wishes will indicate Yuan Gong's adherence to his vow, and the Cave will be protected by a curtain of fog.

From here, the story continues on earth and gradually zooms in on an old vixen, a celestial fox endowed with magic powers, called Holy Auntie, and her daughter Hu Mei and son Hu Chu, or Quezi. Holy Auntie's skills in sorcery are limited, since she does not possess real Taoist craft, and, following an old adage, she decides to set out with her children to Dream-of-the-Clouds and the White Cloud Cave to learn Taoist magic. On the way she leaves her son behind in a Taoist temple to be taught Tao. At one point during her journey,

9 Feng Menglong, *The Sorcerer's Revolt*, trans. Nathan Sturman (s.l., 2008) 21.

10 Ibid., 24.

Auntie herself is suddenly taken to heaven for a meeting with Empress Wu Zetian, formerly of the Tang dynasty, because the fates of the two women were linked. The empress, who is now a fox-spirit, tells Holy Auntie about her downfall during her life on earth and her resentment of the rebellion against the Tang emperor. After her 'worldly fate', Heaven sent her back to rule, but she could not prevent Huang Chao, the leader of the rebellion, from usurping the throne, since 'mortal men and women are different according to their times, but we spirits are the same throughout the ages. When I was Empress Wu on earth, the time when anyone could take the throne had come.'[11] She proceeds by recounting how, in a previous life, Holy Auntie's daughter was a man, who was her—the empress's—lover. It is predicted that she will become an imperial concubine, but will ultimately be transformed into a queen who, after the empress is turned into a man, will be her/his wife. Thus, a secret bond is established between the two women, who will meet again in twenty-eight years. Holy Auntie promises to improve her magic skills to help bring about this exalted outcome. When Holy Auntie regains consciousness, she notices that her daughter has disappeared.[12]

After this peculiar intermezzo, Holy Auntie continues her journey and establishes herself as a Taoist nun who has received the Sixteen Scriptures from the Puxian Bodhisattva and who is able to read the most cryptic sutras. But although she is proclaimed a bodhisattva, she is still incapable of real sorcery and true spiritual greatness. In the meantime, an old Bonze finds a mysterious egg in the temple garden. He lets the egg be hatched by a goose, but remarkably a tiny infant comes out of it. Appalled, he tries to bury the child, but it keeps finding its way to the surface and grows at amazing speed. Finally, he accepts the child and names it Bonze Dan, meaning Bonze Egg. The boy turns out to be a brilliant pupil devouring the classics and soon embarks upon a life as a wandering monk. One day he hears about the secret charms in the White Cloud Cave and decides to steal them. After two futile efforts, he finally succeeds in copying half of them, after promising, with all his heart, to assist Heaven and follow Tao, and never to use them for evil purposes. However, he is unable to read the formulas.

In the meantime, Holy Auntie has become a venerated saint, due to the protection of Deputy Yang, who is a religious fanatic. Inevitably, she will be united with Bonze Dan, who, after his wanderings, is led towards her. When they meet, they immediately recognize each other as 'brother' and 'sister':

---

11 Ibid., 75.

12 Ibid., 75, 78.

> And for a couple of moments there was only silence between them, until the two inevitably began bantering in ghost talk. And this meeting in large part tells us that a monk who has stolen Heaven's secrets will soon become conversant in their tadpole-like script, while an old hag of a sorceress will suddenly change from a cloistered reader of the sutras into a fearsome goddess of evil.[13]

And the cost of the meeting will be high. At once both Bonze Dan and Holy Auntie understand the prognostic dreams and formulas they have received and together they decide to set up a temple to practise the secret charms stolen by Bonze Dan, to produce gold through alchemic experiments and to summon the spirits obeying their commands. Holy Auntie also recovers her son Quezi, who is now versed in Taoist magic.

The story now turns away from Holy Auntie and Bonze Dan to focus on Emperor Zhenzong, who is in a bind because of the threat of the barbarians on the north-eastern frontier. A 'smooth talking' official advises him to arrange for a ceremonial investiture at Mount Taishan to receive Heaven's blessings and to have the dynasty properly consecrated. He asks the help of a Taoist monk, who applies charms that make the emperor dream that secret writings will be sent down from Heaven for his 'pious and devout' use. The emperor issues a decree that everyone who has received a book with Heaven's writings should present himself at the imperial court: 'And if such a person should already be an official of mine, his salary and benefits will be enhanced greatly.'[14] As may be expected, the prime minister succeeds in tracing a Taoist book tied at an ornamental owl's tail. Soon reports of other findings of secret books flood in.

Since Zhenzong has no successor to the throne, he sends a proclamation to the monasteries to pray and sacrifice to the Jade Emperor to give him a son. Thereupon the Jade Emperor sends a fairy to earth to become the child of the imperial concubine and later become Emperor Renzong. In the meantime, Hu Meir, Holy Auntie's daughter, succeeds in penetrating court circles and transfigures into the daughter of a prominent squire. Eventually, Holy Auntie gives her a book of magic, which helps her to advance. She marries the vicious Squire Wang, who, it turns out, is a male reincarnation of the aforementioned Queen Wu Zetian, who had been her lover four hundred years ago, in a previous life. In the meantime, Holy Auntie and Bonze Dan have gathered a band of sorcerers who pester and deceive the people. The news about their vicious

13 Ibid., 155.

14 Ibid., 195.

FIGURE 4 *Emissaries bring news from the provinces of Khaybar and Chin to Anusherwan, from the Hamzanama, 16th century.*

activities reaches Emperor Renzong, who orders a campaign to eliminate them, but he is surrounded by unworthy, evil, officials, and everywhere the conditions deteriorate and revolts break out. Holy Auntie's band of sorcerers conspires with Squire Wang, who starts a revolt and, with the help of the sorcerers, seizes the throne of the Eastern Peace County. Hu Meir now becomes queen, Holy Auntie becomes Queen Mother, and they all indulge in a life of decadence

and abuse. Only Bonze Dan has left the group and has retired to the Spring of Sweetness Temple, because he realizes that the new government is not in accordance with the rules of Heaven and that the people are suffering.

The news of the disruptive activities of the sorcerers, the spread of corruption, and the revolt finally reaches the Palace of Heaven and the Lord of the universe, the Jade Emperor. An investigation reveals that 'the theft of the codes by some mortal has resulted in an incident that has harmed the people, and so collective punishment of all involved is proper and fitting.'[15] However, some culprits were only deceived by others and are therefore less culpable, and even the Heavenly institutions are not without blame:

> Our Board of Astronomy failed to predict that the heavenly writings of White Cloud Cave would come to light and that the resulting sorcery would spread down the present day, emboldening that fox's party to bring about this catastrophe. It was all enumerable by Fate and none of the fault lies with the White Ape God. The writings of Heaven were actually stolen by Bonze Dan.[16]

Further investigations bring to light that the rebellious Squire Wang Ze is actually destined for rebirth in China every five hundred years as a devil king, 'with an appetite for lewdness, killing and revolt, disturbing the balance of the cosmos. Such a devil can only be restrained by a truly enlightened leader. Those forged books of Emperor Zhenzong's time had mocked Heaven with ghost tales and fermented all sorts of disorders, planting the roots of sorcery.'[17] These mishaps in the end resulted in the birth of Wang Ze, who was destined to rule for thirteen years.

While these procedures are going on, the struggle on earth continues. Mystery Girl, the martial goddess, is sent to exterminate the forces of evil, with the help of a holy monk, who turns out to be Bonze Dan, now the adversary of Holy Auntie. Mystery Girl discovers that the orthodox laws had been written on the right-hand wall of the White Cloud Cave and the malignant charms on the left-hand wall. It was the latter that were used by the malevolent sorcerers. Now the 'genuine truth' will be mobilized against these harmful charms and 'heterodox evil will be rectified by religious truth'.[18] Needless to say, Mystery Girl succeeds in subduing the revolt and capturing Holy Auntie, whom she

15 Ibid., 438.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid., 439.
18 Ibid., 455.

unmasks before the Palace of Heaven's Bright Treasure Mirror of Sorcery. Holy Auntie is led before the Jade Emperor and imprisoned. Bonze Dan, who helped Mystery Girl to gain the upper hand, is still venerated, and the White Ape God is restored to his former position of Lord of White Cloud Cave and guardian of the secret writings in the Cultural Affairs Ministry in Heaven.

This summary of *The sorcerer's revolt* does only limited justice to the complexity of the novel. At several points the story branches out to include subplots or to describe the backgrounds of characters or to display the workings of magic. Colourful scenes present glimpses of common life and not only weave in the personal vicissitudes of a large number of characters, but also highlight and criticize instances of corruption, oppression, greed, and fraud. All kinds of tricksters pass by to strip the people of their money or to gain prestige and status, often by magic, pretended magic, or outright deceit. Feng Menglong's social interest and the way he expresses it are not only evidence of his proficiency as a writer, but also reflect the concerns of his time. The late Ming dynasty is usually considered as a period of enlightened despotism gradually slipping into an oppressive regime, but also as a period in which arts and sciences blossomed, and literature, in particular, reached its highest peaks. Feng Menglong's novel should be ranked among such contemporary masterpieces as *The dream of the red chamber* and *The outlaws of the marches*, which also present a sublime portrait of life in imperial China.

As is often the case in Chinese literature, the main narrative is embedded in a framework of historical references. The novel opens with a mention of the Tang Emperor Xuanzong and the ministerial controversy that enabled An Lushan (713–742) to revolt against him. Subsequently, the war between the kingdoms of Wu and Yue elicits the intervention of Nyu, or Mystery Girl, and the confrontation between her and Yuan Gong. Empress Wu Zetian is also a historical figure of the early Tang dynasty, and the actual story of Holy Auntie begins in the reign of the Northern Song Emperor Zhenzong (998 C.E.). This is also the period in which the revolt takes place, under Zhenzong's son and successor Renzong. The rebel Wang and several other officials involved in the revolt or the counter-expedition are also modelled on historical persons. Finally, one of the inserted stories is the episode of the Shang Emperor Zhou, who is manipulated by his concubine Daiji, who is possessed by a fox-spirit, until King Wu founds the new Zhou dynasty. This episode provided the basic plot for the novels 'The expedition of Wu' and *Creation of the gods* discussed in the previous chapters. These historical narratives were probably well known among literati and perhaps even among the general—educated—audience.

The framework of historical references adds a sense of realism to the narrative, but in the worldview of the novel earthly history is a relative notion. From

the beginning it is made clear that history as experienced by humans is only one of the components of a reality that encompasses the totality of the universe. What happens on earth is in no way separated from the celestial spheres and the Heavenly residences of the divinities and immortals. Whereas stories from the Muslim traditions show a certain interaction between the supernatural and human domains, represented by localized enchantments and marvellous journeys, in *The sorcerer's revolt* there is no clear separation, with the protagonists travelling to the heavens and back, even dwelling in a kind of realm of total time. This does not mean that these realms form a single amalgamated whole; the interaction is rather regulated and segmented according to individual destinies and behaviour, and ordered in a hierarchical system. The individual's place in history is determined by fate, surely, but its manifestation cannot always be predicted. Fate has to be enacted by humans and other creatures, and is often revealed only when specific events have occurred or when the course of events has taken a specific turn.

The complex interaction between the various domains of the universe takes place through magic and sorcery, but more systematically through transformations and transmigrations. People who die do not vanish, but enter a new phase in their existence, possibly in another realm. Conversely, gods, fairies, and immortals may assume human form to fulfil the next stage of their destiny. Therefore, visible forms are only a partial manifestation of a much broader reality. This constant shuttling between appearances does not mean that mere chaos or arbitrariness reigns. Within the process of permanent transformations there are some fixed elements. Whereas appearances change all the time, the true essence of individuals remains the same:

> Now, the original soul of everything in the universe is fixed in the memory of the Eye Spirit, and though you transform yourself countless times, your true self never changes there. And as the Mirror of Heaven reflects back into the Eye's Sprit's two pupils, Chu Nyu learnt how the fox spirit became a celestial fox after years of cultivation and all about her getting the stolen arms. Watching the maiden look at her past as if on a tapestry from Heaven's loom, Holy Auntie feared the worst and closed her eyes, holding up her wrists for binding.[19]

Thus, there is a basic structure, a primordial stability within a fluid passage of time. The driving force within this system is Fate, but the effectuation of Fate

19 Ibid., 472.

must be 'managed', which is difficult because no one has total knowledge of its secrets and it is only gradually and partially revealed.

Because of the essential unity of the universe, every event has its consequences within the various domains. An event on earth can have its cause in Heaven, and *vice versa*; an event in a distant past may cause a disruption in the far future. The workings of this interaction are beautifully shown in the novel when the process of revelation is disturbed by the Ape's negligence. This misadventure, which is largely left unpunished, causes a crack in the basic harmony between Heaven and earth, and in the sequence of time. This in turn creates the possibility of disharmony on earth fostering disobedience, corruption, rebellion, and war. This situation is exploited by the wicked Empress Wu Ze, who represents evil, but who is fated to reincarnate on earth to be reunited with her former lover, who transmigrated in the figure of Hu Meir. The result is a Faustian pact between the forces of evil in Heaven and on earth, between the Empress Wu Zetian and the fox-spirit Holy Auntie, to realize their respective aims. Only after the predestined reunion has taken place, is the Jade Emperor in Heaven notified of the ominous turn of events, and orders are issued to set things straight. Still, this can happen only once destiny has completed its course.

Within this interplay between earthly and celestial forces, the struggle to 'manage' the consequences of fate is also a struggle between good and evil. Disharmony results in opportunities for evil to expand at the expense of good. Corrupt ministers and administrators have the chance to carry out their destructive schemes, while morally upright officials and military men are marginalized and ignored. The empire falls prey to civil war and oppression. The restoration of harmony is accompanied by political stability, prosperity, and peace. But the balance between these forces is always determined by the complex framework of interrelations in which it is embedded. An evil deed in the past lingers as an unrequited debt on history and can at its predestined moment re-appear and disrupt the course of events. Conversely, suffering can be compensated for in a future life, or by a person's ascent within the hierarchy of Heaven. It is as if the universe contains a stable quantity of good and evil, which is constantly being redistributed over persons and gods, by perpetual transformation, and by the disequilibrium engendered by fate. At the same time, virtue, or its opposite, as a moral force, contributes to the shaping of these balances, since it enforces changes in the cosmic hierarchy.

What do all these observations tell us about concepts and perceptions of kingship? It is clear that notions and practices of kingship are incorporated in a broad vision of the structure of the universe. Like all other phenomena on earth, kingship is woven into the interplay of natural and supernatural forces

determining the course of events, manifested in transmigrations, transformations, and the hierarchies of authority and esoteric competence. The intricacy of these forces has as a consequence that it is not always clear where agency and the responsibility for acts and occurrences lie. Of course, the whole cosmic structure is moulded into hierarchies, with at the top, on earth, the emperor, and, in the Ninth Heaven, the Jade Emperor. In theory, these emperors enjoy supreme authority and their commands should be obeyed, since they represent the stability of the cosmic order. Still, they are not all-powerful or omniscient, since they need the help of ministries, informers, assistants, specialists in several fields, etc., who all function within the system of powers and competences.

The emperors are thus not so much powerful in themselves, as pivots within the system that regulates the unfolding of fate. It is their task to harmonize human action, on all levels, with the incontestable power of fate, and thus they derive their authority only from the ability to influence the destinies of both individuals and large collectivities (China). It seems that in spite of the central position of the emperor, power is diffuse and not vested in individuals, but in history itself, all humans and divinities acting as the instruments for the implementation of fate, which are either seeking opportunities to act out their role, or trying to find out the nature of their role. The emperor, too, is one of the main instruments of fate, acting as a cornerstone supporting the cosmic system; but being a cornerstone, the emperor is not free to act as he pleases, but is steered by the all-powerful effectuation of fate. As we have seen in the case of 'The expedition of Wu' and *Creation of the gods*, the Jade Emperor represents supreme authority, but even his authority is derived from a more powerful system, and he, too, is caught in the tension between his personal responsibility and inclinations, and the 'neutral' forces that hold him imprisoned in his status.

The system of authority as depicted in *The sorcerer's revolt* operates within the rather dusky domain in which mythology, religion, magic, and supernatural powers prevail. In order to develop power within this system several forms of insight are required, which have to be linked to effective means to exert power. Holy Auntie has acquired magical abilities, allowing her to help the rebellious Wang and his troops to achieve victory, which is ultimately the event enabling Empress Wu Zetian to realize her predestined reunion with her lover. It is the leaking of secret religious knowledge that sets in motion the whole process that allows Bonze Dan to fulfil his mission as a pious monk. And it is the magical capabilities of Mystery Girl that finally enable the Jade Emperor to set things straight and to suppress the revolt, after he has been informed of fate's disruptive course. Actual power is fragmented and bound, and esoteric knowledge is essential to unravel the nature and location of responsibility,

and, to be sure, the relation between responsibility and individual destinies. This is beautifully illustrated by the tribunal at the end, when the culprits have to be determined, which, because of the inescapability of fate, is no easy matter.

The celestial tribunals and interventions show that apart from fate the main element governing the course of history is morality, that is, the balance between good and evil forces, not only on earth, but also in heaven. Esoteric insights can be used for good or bad purposes, and are linked to manifestations of good and evil on the level of ordinary humans. It is here that Feng Menglong expresses his main message: his concern with the conditions of the population of the empire and the ways in which corruption, greed, and ambition destroy the social fabric. These destructive forces are fostered by deceitful and avaricious priests, monks, and (pseudo-)sorcerers, who use 'bad' magic to achieve their aims. They exploit the gullibility and superstitions of the people and pervert religion with their fraudulent tricks. A rational view of life and a return to true religion will protect the empire against these destructive elements. This is the way to conjure the supernatural powers evoked by villains, which haunt society and undermine the administration. They need to be exorcised before the emperor can represent the harmony needed for inculcating history with moral values and harmony. This makes Feng Menglong a true representative of what may be called an enlightened view of life.

Jan Potocki's *Manuscrit Trouvé à Saragosse*

The examples examined in this section so far show the importance of esoteric beliefs and knowledge in the constitution of visions of kingship, authority, and society. It is well known that in medieval times, within the different traditions and cultural realms, worldviews were steeped in what would later be called superstitions, myths, and erroneous belief in supernatural forces. It is less well known that these tendencies did not die out in the core period of the European Enlightenment, the eighteenth century, but rather blossomed as never before. As esoteric knowledge was part of science in seventeenth-century China, in Europe, too, the new inquisitiveness of the Enlightenment coincided with a new, more systematic interest in esoteric sciences, partly as a search for new scientific paradigms, and partly to compensate for the diminished authority of the religious—Roman Catholic—worldview. Where the religious representation of the universe began to show fissures, glimpses of other, hidden, worlds shined through. Where the forces of angels became less persuasive, images of devils and demons and their world of magic emerged.

In Europe, knowledge of the esoteric and occult sciences has usually been associated with the Orient, not only because it was seen as the cradle of scientific knowledge, but also because it was imagined as the region where supernatural forces could freely unleash themselves. There, other natural laws reigned, which allowed for magic and demonic creatures to intervene unhampered in human life. This vision changed during the eighteenth century, when the idea of the universality of the laws of nature gained influence and the image of a heterogeneous world gradually disappeared. Still, in literature the association between the Orient and esoteric knowledge remained, mainly because of the influence of the French translation of the *Thousand and one nights* by Antoine Galland. Galland's *Mille et une nuits* became the source of inspiration not only for a long and structural taste for orientalism in European literature; it also more specifically became a model for ways to incorporate esoteric and supernatural visions into fictional narrative.

Since in many of the *Nights*' stories supernatural elements (magic, *jinn*s) interfere freely with realist descriptions of daily life, it suggested a world in which reality was not unequivocal and in which the supernatural was immanently present at all times, hidden inside the perceived material world. This literary expression of popular esotericism was one of the main sources of what came to be known as Gothic literature in its various forms. It is exemplified by authors such as Horace Walpole (1717–1797; *Hieroglyphs*; *The castle of Otranto*), Jacques Cazotte (1719–1792; *Suite des Mille et une nuits*; *Le diable amoureux*), and William Beckford (1760–1844; *Vathek*; *Épisodes*). Although it has often been suggested that the 'fabulous' current in European literature instigated by the *Thousand and one nights* and refashioned by the Oriental tale was obscured by the new realism of the bourgeois novel, it is more likely that this tendency survived within these esoteric and Gothic strands, to re-emerge more forcefully in Romanticism in the nineteenth century. It appears to be more correct to say that, at least from the eighteenth century onwards, fantastic and realist types of literature evolved side by side and influenced each other. Within this process, the initial exoticism of the *Thousand and one nights* became less visible and was transformed into other devices of psychological or supernatural estrangement.[20]

An example of the tendencies summarized above is the intriguing novel *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* by the Polish-French writer, traveller, and diplo-

20 Richard van Leeuwen, 'Religion and Oriental Tales in the 18th Century: The Emergence of the Fantastic Genre,' in: Aboubakr Chraïbi and Ilaria Vitali, eds, *Variations françaises sur les Mille et une nuits: quelles versions pour quelles effets?* Francofonia; studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese 69 (Autumn, 2015) 35–56.

mat Jean Potocki (1761–1815). This novel is not only the account of a princely initiation, but also combines the influences of orientalism (*Thousand and one nights*) and the exploration of esoteric knowledge. In the end the story attempts to situate these elements within an 'enlightened' view of the world. Within the new epistemological approaches to the Orient and its historical and intellectual contexts that emerged in the eighteenth century, Jean Potocki stands out not merely as a remarkable figure, but rather as the embodiment of the spirit of his age. His inquisitive mind, his interest in the sciences, rational thought, and *belles-lettres*, his inclination towards adventures and travelling, and his interference in political and diplomatic events could not but lead to a vivid interest in the Orient, and, more specifically, in Oriental storytelling and the *Thousand and one nights*. Potocki's fascination with the Orient was directed at scholarly, literary, and practical aims. He advocated the foundation of a Russian Academy of Oriental Languages, after the Austrian example, and attempted to design policies for the stimulation of Asian trade. His interest is more directly expressed, however, through his own experiences in the Orient during his journeys to Spain and Morocco, Turkey and Egypt, and Mongolia and the Caucasus. These experiences are recorded in his travel accounts, which are of both scholarly and biographical interest. Potocki enjoyed immersing himself in the Oriental environment, and in his *Voyage en Turquie et l'Égypte* he relates how he roams through the alleys of Istanbul, immersing himself in their peaceful and tranquil atmosphere, and how he dons Oriental dress when he sets out for Egypt, as was the custom of truly adventurous travellers of the period.[21] With keen interest he describes the customs of the Turks, Egyptians, and Moroccans, focusing particularly on their *morale*, their psychological attitudes and behaviour, which differentiates them from Europeans.

At an early stage, Potocki showed an interest in Oriental storytelling, and in his aforementioned *Voyage en Turquie et en Égypte*, published in 1784, when he was twenty-three, Potocki interspersed his letters with stories and anecdotes, some quoted from, for instance, a storyteller in a coffeehouse in Constantinople, others written by himself, inspired by his readings of Oriental tales. This interest is obvious, too, throughout the account of his journey to Morocco in 1791, in which he refers to the *Thousand and one nights* on various occasions. When visiting a tribal chief Potocki wraps his present in four silk handkerchiefs, as the mother of Aladdin did in the famous story in Galland's *Mille et une nuits*.[22] He remarks that the sultan refers to himself as 'emir al-moumenin',

21 Jean Potocki, *Voyage en Turquie et en Égypte*, Serge Plantureux, ed. (Paris, 1999).

22 Ibid., 27.

a term translated by Galland as 'Commandeur des Croyants', one of the titles of the caliph.[23] At other places he explicitly refers to the *Thousand and one nights* in his descriptions of specific Moroccan phenomena, such as the town crier.[24] In Fez, Potocki asks a young student to procure a copy of the *Thousand and one nights* for him, which, according to the student, is known in Morocco as the 'Three hundred and fifty-four nights'. The student does not succeed in finding a copy, but he returns with a work of a similar genre, called, according to Potocki, *Giafar et Barmaki*, in which part of the *Thousand and one nights*' stories can be found. Potocki reads the beginning of the text in which it is related how a sultan, chasing a white gazelle, enters an enchanted castle, covered with valuable tiles.[25]

It is clear from the passages in his travel accounts that Galland's *Mille et une nuits* was an important source of knowledge for Potocki and a frame of reference for his observations of Moroccan life and society, heeding Galland's remark that the work contained all the information about the manners and customs of the Orientals that an interested reader might need. It seems plausible to assume that the combination of his readings of the *Mille et une nuits* and his impressions of Morocco together provided the inspiration for his great literary project *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. This suggestion is strengthened by Potocki's statement that during his stay in Madrid he befriended the Moroccan ambassador to Spain, Sidi Mohammed Bin-Otman, who told him many Oriental stories, which he intended to write down sometime.[26] One of the stories of Bin-Otman is inserted into the account itself.[27] Apparently, during his journey through Spain and Morocco Potocki collected material, ideas, and impressions from various sources, which, together with Galland's *Mille et une nuits*, gradually became the first drafts of the *Manuscrit*. Just as in the case of the *Thousand and one nights*, oral sources were important, reflecting the authentic act of storytelling, which is also prominent in the work itself. They were combined with other sources, which, like the *Nights*, were put together in a collection over a long stretch of time, being reordered and recomposed various times. Thus, the textual history of the *Manuscrit* to a large extent resembles the complex process in which the *Thousand and one nights*, at least its European branch, took shape.

23 Ibid., 24.
24 Ibid., 57.
25 Ibid., 60–61.
26 Ibid., 23–24.
27 Ibid., 53.

These parallels between *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* and the *Thousand and one nights*, with regard to the nature of the sources and the process in which the material was gathered in a single work, are not without significance. They strengthen the generic connections between the two works, since they resulted in both cases in a broad diversity of material that was finally incorporated in the collections, ranging from *histoires galantes* to scientific compendiums, from fairy tales to edifying allegories, from chivalrous tales to love stories. Moreover, in both cases they explain the formal structure of the work as a seemingly endless labyrinth of stories, which are loosely connected to each other, or embedded in each other, and do not seem to lead to a clear denouement. Although the suspense is upheld by the connection between the framing story and the embedded stories, only at the end is a plot revealed that gives coherence to the collection as a whole and explains its many digressions, reconciling, so to speak, the 'sense of an ending' with the narrative device of postponement.

The origin and growth of the two texts thus show that their concepts are similar, a similarity that is further elaborated in the structure of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*. Like the *Thousand and one nights*, the *Manuscrit* has a layered structure, which consists of a framing story and a chain of embedded stories. It is built on the by now familiar dialogic structure of characters in a framing story telling tales to each other that are embedded in the frame. The conceptual and formal resemblances, with their elements of self-reflexivity and meta-fictionality, link the *Manuscrit* first of all with the framing story of the *Thousand and one nights*, the story of 'Shahriyâr and his brother', in which the origin and the rationale of the storytelling are explained.[28] In the *Manuscrit* we have the 'Avertissement', which relates the discovery of the *Manuscrit* by a French officer, the possession of which saves him when his company is captured by Spanish troops. The text is subsequently dictated to the officer by the Spanish captain, while he resides in the Spaniard's house. The narrative does not return to this level, but in the final paragraphs of the book the hero, Alphonse van Worden, explains how he hides a copy of the book in an iron chest, to be found by his descendants. This is a significant procedure, since it was the way of the converted Muslims (Moriscos) after the Reconquista to hide their religious texts, and it is therefore suggested that the *Manuscrit* contains a life-story that is not part of official, well-known, history, but rather of a secret history, a hidden part of Spain's past.

28 For a summary of the framing story, see: Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*.

On the second level we meet the protagonist Alphonse van Worden, who is travelling through the Sierra Morena and who spends the night in the inn Venta Quemada, an old Moorish stronghold where he meets the sisters Emina and Zibbedee for the first time. The sisters not only try to seduce Alphonse, but also tell him the story of the Cassar-Gomelez and the history of the Gomelez family, which is interrupted by daybreak. This scene, of course, calls to mind the image of Shahriyar and the two sisters Shahrazad and Dunyazad in the framing story of the *Thousand and one nights*, with its entwinement of eroticism and storytelling. In both cases it is the women who aspire to marry the heroes, Shahriyar and Alphonse. The parallel between Shahriyar and Alphonse is further strengthened by their conforming to ideal types of masculinity. They are both powerful heroes, full of masculine virtues, and paragons of noble integrity. Both, however, have in some sense become isolated in their masculinity and in the symbolic narrowness of their status and personality, and are now re-connected with various aspects of femininity, Shahriyar through the combination of eroticism and storytelling, Alphonse through eroticism and the disclosure of a hidden part of his family's history, because he discovers that he is a descendant of the Moorish Gomelez family through his mother.

In the case of Shahriyar a long trajectory of 'seduction' ensues, which is meant to avert certain death. In the case of Alphonse, the seduction is meant to have him abandon his faith and convert to Islam. This is countered, however, by the stories of the hermit and the threat of the Inquisition, subjecting Alphonse to dangers from both sides. In both cases, a kind of deadlock is created, a situation of liminality in which the position of the protagonists is, so to speak, renegotiated. Through the prolongation of the dilemma, through the postponement of the final decision, visions of life and the world are evoked in stories and discourses, with the intention to reconstruct the vision of the protagonist and enable a denouement: The rigid, monolithic, worldviews of Shahriyar and Alphonse have to be changed in order to break the deadlock, and this can be achieved only by the interference of the imagination and human ingenuity, by subjecting Shahriyar and Alphonse to the power of the human intellect and constructing a vision of the world in which the death-threat is eliminated.

In the framing story of the *Thousand and one nights* the deadlock caused by Shahrazad's postponement of her execution is part of a much more far-reaching stagnation, which is the inability of Shahriyar to beget successors. In the story it is not explained why the first marriage of Shahriyar, with the adulterous spouse, remained childless, but by installing a regime in which he marries a virgin every night who is subsequently executed in the morning, all means of procreation are aborted. The king will have no sons to succeed him, and the dynasty will come to an end. The continuation of time will definitively

be interrupted. Likewise, in *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, it is the dynasty of the Gomelez that seems to have reached its end. After a glorious past, the dynasty is looking for a new sheykh to secure its survival, and Alphonse is chosen as a husband for Emina and Zibbedee to safeguard the continuation of the family.

In both narratives the state of stagnation, the interruption of the passage of time, is related to the solid, unambiguous male identity of the protagonists, which is buttressed with forms of authority and the threat of physical violence, personified by Shahriyar and the Inquisition. This form of monolithic identity and authority is linked to masculine qualities and juxtaposed with a non-violent strategy of seduction, persuasion, and imagination, associated with feminine ingenuity. Evidently, the use of force would not be an option for Shahrazad or Emine and Zibbedee, since not only do they lack the required physical means, but the death of Shahriyar and Alphonse would not solve the underlying problem. The only solution lies in persuasion and the procuring of affection, a transformation of the rigid mentality of the males. Thus, in both cases it is feminine imagination that penetrates into the stronghold of masculinity to achieve a gradual softening of the rigid identification with power and violence. In both cases, the story ends with the revealing of the newborn children, which are only half-consciously begotten by Shahriyar and Alphonse, but which ensure the continuation of the dynasty and restore the regular passage of time.

It is, of course, no coincidence that storytelling takes such a prominent place in the undermining of the violent form of power. In both narratives it is suggested that the threat of violence is related to a narrow and monolithic worldview, which has no vision of the complexity of reality and the possible inclusion of what is seen as different and alien. In the case of Shahriyar it is the feminine element that is repressed; in the case of Alphonse it is the Moorish part of his identity that is not acknowledged. In both cases the narrow, inflexible worldview is relativized by impregnating it with the imagination and alternative visions contained in stories, life accounts etc. In the end, the incorporation of the alien element and the adoption of a form of plurality acknowledging the multi-faceted nature of reality produce a new dynamism, new life, and a new future. By showing how the imagination can intervene in the course of events, a new synthesis is achieved between male and female, Spanish and Moorish elements of identity based on the acceptance of the complexity of reality.

The parallels summarized above show how profoundly the stories of Shahriyar and Shahrazad and the *Manuscrit trouvé à Sarragosse* are connected, but the influence of the *Thousand and one nights* is not limited to the framing story only. Parallels can also be traced with a type of story very common in Arabic

literature in general and in the *Thousand and one nights* more particularly: the love romance. In these stories, which resemble European medieval romances, a young hero, usually a prince or a merchant's son, sets out to find his beloved and, before reaching the object of his desire, roams through a world of wonders, enticements, and threats, in which he has to find his way. Often he has to cross magical landscapes, enter enchanted spaces, and combat mysterious enemies. After he has reached his goal, he returns home and is re-incorporated into his community, usually as a successor to the throne, now comfortably married. This pattern is evident in the *Manuscrit trouvé à Sarragosse* as well, where Alphonse, a brave young officer, with a bright future, sets out on a journey and is suddenly caught in a rough landscape full of mysterious forces, strange events, and physical dangers. He has entered a labyrinth that shakes all his certainties and convictions, and from which he has to find a way out before he can continue on his journey and assume his position at the court of the king.

Romances of this kind are usually interpreted as stories of initiation, in which an adolescent hero is subjected to a rite of passage before he can fulfil his predestined role in society. The hero is thrown into a state of uncertainty and liminality, in which his identity has been called into question, and in which his courage, intelligence, and ingenuity are tested. He has to confront dangers, allurements, dilemmas, and obstacles, and show that he can overcome them and take the correct decisions. In the meantime his personality is reshaped to be fit to fulfil his required tasks in the service of the dynasty and the community. Alphonse's predicaments seem to serve the same purpose of initiation. The state of liminality and uncertainty is symbolized by the harsh landscape of the Sierra Morena, full of brigands and unexplainable forces. His steadfastness and determination are tested in several ways; he is confronted with enemies, frightening mirages, horrors, dreams, and temptations, which all unhinge his former identity and radically revise his vision of himself. Only after he has passed his several trials successfully, that is, after he has secured the continuation of the Gomelez dynasty without relinquishing his Catholic faith, can he proceed to his destination and become what he is destined to be. As in the Arabic romances, Alphonse's initiation into sexuality and eroticism is an important element of his formation as an adult man. Significantly, the journey of initiation completed by Alphonse is mirrored by the story of the Gomelez sheykh about his own journey when he was an adolescent and destined to assume the leadership of the family.

The idea of initiation is also the main conceptual component of cycles of the mirror-for-princes type, such as the *Seven viziers*, which consist of a framing tale in which the elements of the intrigue are explicated and a number of inserted stories. As in *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, in most narratives of this type the

conduct of a young prince, often his addiction to women, threatens the survival of the dynasty and the empire, and the prince is saved by a learned vizier. In *Manuscrit* it is the figure of the sheykh of the Gomelez, who turns out to have been arranging and supervising the 'education' of Alphonse, and thereby takes the place of Shahrazâd, but the elements of seduction and trial and the juxtaposition of stories, discourses, etc., link the work to the genre of the mirror-for-princes, which in the end results in the intellectual and moral education of the prince, but also, ultimately, of the reader.

It has been argued that it is erroneous to consider the *Manuscrit* as belonging to the tradition of the fantastic novel, which at the end of the eighteenth century was represented, for instance, by Cazotte's *Le diable amoureux* and Beckford's *Vathek*. It should rather be seen as an anti-fantastic novel, since all occurrences of supernatural forces and events are in the end disclosed to have been illusions and manipulations of the sheykh of the Gomelez. Every suggestion of the existence of magical forces is wiped away, as all strange events can be rationally explained. Still, even if *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* is not a fantastic novel, it is a novel in which the relationship between reality and potentially supernatural forces is explored, both as part of a complex reality and as an aspect of human perception and the human psyche. Even if, for Potocki's rational mind, there is no supernatural realm, reality is still more complex than it seems. It is this explanation of the nature of reality that links *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* with other novels that can be more unequivocally called 'fantastic' and in which the author attempts to lay bare deeper layers of reality, both inside the human mind and in the material world.

Our analysis above shows that it is justified to conclude that *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* is a pivotal work in the transmission of Oriental, Arabic influences to European literature, both because of its ambitious concept and through its use of Arabic literary sources. Interestingly, the incorporation of Arabic elements is not restricted to the formal structure of the work, but is also part of its theme, which deals chiefly with Islam as a repressed part of the identity of Spain. On both these levels, the model after which the work was moulded is the *Thousand and one nights*, which provided formal as well as conceptual matrices. Apart from the clear formal parallels, perhaps the main element taken from the *Thousand and one nights* is the use of the evocation of narrative, imaginary, and illusionary worlds as a strategy to undermine rigid, ideological visions of reality. The sheykh of the Gomelez conjures up an illusionary world filled with magical, enacted, happenings and performance as a means to disrupt Alphionse's one-dimensional worldview, which is based on his being brought up with the solid values of Christian Spain. The suggestion of magic is particularly conducive to this deconstruction, since it is contradictory

to both Christian and rationalistic views of reality. Moreover, in the European mind, magic was specifically associated with the Orient, and it thus contributes to the sense of estrangement that Alphonse experiences in the Sierra Morena. In the end, the magical events turn out to be illusions concocted by the sheykh, but the narrative shows that the evocation of 'unreality' can help to reconstruct visions of reality and thereby influence the course of events, as often occurs in the *Thousand and one nights*.

Potocki's aim with this deconstruction seems to be the re-acknowledgement of the Moorish component of the Spanish past, which has remained hidden and slumbering without being recognized. The Gomelez have, so to speak, been isolated from the mainstream of history and condemned literally to an underground existence. It is conspicuous that they are described as Shiites, which implies that also in the Muslim periods of Spanish history they were a minority community, not incorporated into the main institutions of authority and always planning to penetrate into the centres of power. Moreover, the Shiites are allowed to conceal their true religious identity through dissimulation, or *taqiyya*, and have an important messianic component in their doctrines. These aspects evidently enhanced Potocki's ability to create suspense and to play with the idea of a hidden community scheming to conquer the world. And the fact that they are hidden is part of their subversive strategies.

In the end all these disquieting elements are relegated to their proper places. The magic turns out to be simple manipulations, and the rationalist view of reality is restored. The stronghold of the Gomelez in the Sierra Morena is dismantled, and their dynasty continues to prosper, not in Spain, but in North Africa. This is achieved, however, only after Alphonse has acknowledged his relationship to the Gomelez family and has accepted it as part of his identity. Only in this way can the Gomelez family emerge out of their isolation and be taken up in the course of history, as Muslim rulers in North Africa. Only by acknowledging its Islamic component can Spanish history be complete, although it is not necessary to give up the Christian component: In the end each element has its proper place. All these developments are the result of the esoteric 'knowledge' of the sheykh of the Gomelez being re-injected into the realm of the visible world through the person of the prince, who is thus initiated into the secret of his descent and his true identity.

Concluding Remarks

All our examples in this chapter have in common that they revolve around the theme of initiation into some kind of esoteric knowledge, that of the prince/

vizier himself as a protagonist in his own adventures, or as a prince listening to the adventures of others. The narratives are layered and meant to instruct the reader, mainly through the instruction of the stories' heroes or through the exposure of fraudulent knowledge. The ultimate aim is to realize a middle course between belief and superstition, between the acknowledgement and exorcism of supernatural forces, between moral extremes and between human and divine interests. The prince/vizier is always in the centre of the process; he is the prism revealing the components of power and authority. He is the one who 'sacrifices' himself to bring hidden forces to the surface and anchor stability in the cosmic constellation. He, one might say, collects subconscious fears and fantasies, slays them like fierce monsters, and resigns them to their confined domain within the cosmic structure. And, usually, the prince/vizier is predestined to fulfil this task.

All our examples examined above, finally, have in common that they are composite narratives, incorporating components from various genres, historical and fictional, from various media, oral and written, from various times, ancient and premodern, and from various traditions, religious and political. And, moreover, they combine elements from various cultural traditions, Oriental and Western, Taoist and Buddhist, Islamic and Hindi, Jewish, Greek, and Persian. In spite of the many resemblances in form and content, it is difficult to speculate about relationships and connections. Nevertheless, we can perceive a pattern showing a strong connection between thematic and formal elements within the various literary traditions, which perhaps have not intermingled without obstacles, but which still seem to have 'discovered' similar strategies to convey ideological views and similar forms to ensure the efficacy of the medium of text. The aim of the texts discussed in this and the previous chapter is, invariably, to situate kingship within the broader frameworks of religion and the supernatural, to convey a worldview in which the authority of the king is naturalized and harmonized with cosmic forces.

CHAPTER 4

The Knight and the King

There are two themes that seem to be present in literatures all over the world: love and war. These themes are not only found in all literatures; they are also persistent in literature in all times, as if they represent the basic material of which literature is made or, more fundamentally, the basic human experience that necessitates the phenomenon of storytelling. Whatever may be the case, since, as we have seen, kingship is a basic theme, too, it seems fruitful to link the literary representations of love and war to notions of kingship and its place in the social and cultural imagination. In Chapter Five we will discuss some significant love romances; in this chapter we will turn our attention to six examples of chivalric romances that occupy a crucial position in the literary traditions in which they emerged and which seem eminently suitable for the purposes of this essay. As we will see, the texts not only fulfil the criteria of our selection of material; they also provide sufficient food for thought and speculation.

In order to introduce the romance of chivalry as a generic type and illuminate its relationship with our topic, we will first briefly discuss a specific narrative that appeared in the later versions of the *Thousand and one nights*: the story of 'Ajib and Gharib'. This story is one of the two chivalric romances in the *Nights* (the other is 'Umar al-Nu'man and his sons') and is rather austere as a narrative, interesting more for its structure—and perhaps for its historical references—than for its imaginative details. It is considered by some to be a derivative from the much longer and more elaborated romance *Hamzanama*, which will be discussed below. The story of 'Ajib and Gharib' will allow us to determine the basic ingredients and strategies involved in this type of text. It should be noted here, that in all the literary traditions involved, the genre of the chivalric romance in the period under study is tightly linked to an earlier substratum of romances, from which it evolved and, of course, deviated.

The story of 'Ajib and Gharib' can be summarized as follows: King Kundamir of Kufa (Iraq) begets a son at an advanced age. The child, called Ajib, is entrusted to a priest, but he turns out to be recalcitrant and disobedient. When he grows up, he murders his father and usurps the throne. In a dream he sees a bee coming from his father's penis, which morphs into a lion attacking him. The explanation of the dream by the soothsayers is that the king will have a half-brother who has to be killed because he will be a threat to his rule. It turns out that there is a pregnant slave-girl in the harem, who is now taken away to be

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_006
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

executed. The slave-girl survives, however, and bears a son named Gharib. She is taken as a wife by a tribal chief and has another son by him, named Sahim al-Layl. Gharib grows up to become a fierce hero, and when one day the camp of the tribe is attacked, he rescues Mahdiyya, the daughter of the chief. He falls in love with her, but the chief is reluctant to give her in marriage to him, because she was promised to someone else. He sends Gharib away on an impossible mission: He should defeat the giant who lives in the palace of the legendary Arabian king Ham ibn Shayth ibn Shaddad ibn Khald.

On the way to fulfil his mission, Gharib encounters an old sheykh in a cave, who is 340 years old and was a member of the tribe of Ad, the legendary Arabian hero. Ad's tribe was summoned to convert to the true faith of Ibrahim by the Prophet Hud, who was, however, despised. The whole tribe was exterminated except this sheykh, who accepted conversion. Gharib, convinced of the veracity of the faith, pronounces the *shahada* in the God of Ibrahim and his troops follow his example. The sheykh tells him that the giant whom Gharib has to kill is a fearsome man-eating *ghul*, who descended from the tribe of Ham and Hind, the ancestor of the Indians. He was sent away because of his anthropophagy. The sheykh gives Gharib an iron rod with ten rings of a hundred pounds each, a sword of three yards length, forged with lightning, a shield, a coat of mail, and a Qur'an. Thus armed, Gharib, still a beardless boy of three feet high, defeats the *ghul*, who converts to the true faith. Gharib ascends the throne, which once belonged to Sasa ibn Shayth ibn Shaddad ibn Ad, and has Sahim seated at his right hand. He releases the prisoners held by the *ghul*, among whom is Fakhrtaj, the daughter of the king of the Persians, Daylamites, Turks, and Fire-worshippers. Her father, coming to her rescue, confronts him, but he defeats the Persian. Fakhrtaj wants to marry him and her father now agrees, but he demands that he first kill the rival king al-Jamrakan. Gharib takes part in a tournament with a lance to which a piece of saffron cloth is attached. Afterwards, he loses his way in the royal palace, ends up in Fakhrtaj's bedroom, and makes love to her.

The following parts of the story relate how Gharib takes revenge on the villains who tormented him, his mother, and his father in the past. He is at the summit of his power, and Sahim calls him king of the Persians and the Arabs, son-in-law of Khosrau, the King of the World. During his campaigns he succeeds in converting many tribes, and at some point he sends a letter to Ajib, summoning him to convert. Ajib flees, however, and Gharib occupies the throne of Kufa. When one day he falls asleep in a meadow, he is abducted by jinns, who take him to King Mar'ash, a fire-worshipping jinn, who venerates an oven with coloured flames. Just before Gharib is thrown into the fire, the oven is destroyed by a falling merlon. When Gharib is placed on an auto-da-

fe and God sends rain to extinguish the flames, Mar'ash converts to the faith. Gharib now helps him in his struggle against his jinn rivals and is presented with al-Mahik, the sword that once belonged to Jafith ibn Nuh (Jafeth the son of Noah), and a winged horse. Moreover, Gharib meets the lovely Kawkab al-Sabah, the daughter of the Blue King and a Chinese mother, and falls in love with her. After Gharib is shown the jinn realm of Mount Qaf, he returns to the human world. He sleeps with Fakhrtaj and is officially married to Mahdiyya. In a final episode Gharib miraculously travels to India, unmasks an idol in which a jinn is hidden, and kills a sorceress who wants to possess him. The story ends with the meeting with his—fully grown—son Muradshah.

This brief summary serves not as a starting point for a discussion of the story itself, but rather as a model of the basic characteristics of the genre. Of course, not all narratives discussed below comply with the model and all its characteristics, but these are possibly interesting divergences from the generic type. Some of the basic characteristics are the following:

[1] The stories are usually constructed according to the so-called 'adventure trope', that is, they follow the hero during his peregrinations from his birth or youth until his manhood, describing the obstacles on the way to the fulfilment of his mission, which is, on the one hand, adulthood and personal accomplishment and, on the other hand, the attainment of his position within the society in which he is destined to assume his task as a ruler. Often this trajectory is divided into phases marking a process of transition and concluded with legal matrimony to his beloved and, for instance, with his succession to the throne. It should be noted that in the stories discussed below the love component is usually subordinated to the martial role of the hero, and the ideal composition of the romance is sometimes affected by the historical framework in which the story is set. In some cases the story does not end with the hero's apotheosis, but with his death. An example of this kind of story has been analysed in the previous chapter: the framing story of *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* is reminiscent of the medieval trope of the knight/prince on his way to adulthood.

[2] The generic conventions stipulate that the characters of the story, including the hero, are rather flat and emblematic. The hero does not complete a trajectory of psychological growth, but is from the beginning hewn from one piece, so to speak. Gharib is already strong at an early age, and his only development is his conversion to the true faith. He takes few decisions on his own initiative, but rather responds to events and encounters that impose themselves upon him and spur him on to fulfil his destiny,

without much contemplation or psychological depth. Like the other characters, the hero acts out a stereotypical role that stands for a certain moral type. The hero, of course, represents strength, uprightness, intelligence, courage, inventiveness, and other virtues (though not chastity).

[3] In his emblematic, stereotypical, role the hero instils not only certain values in the story, but also the element of chosenness. He is chosen as a kind of saviour to establish a certain order, which is usually related to religion. His eminence is foretold by the stars, or in a dream, or by some auspicious omen. He is from his early youth recognized as a hero, because he already embodies the virtues with which he is destined to impregnate society. He is the personification of a just cause, which will usually bring salvation to the community by slaying its enemies and the forces of evil. This restoration of order and the charisma which it requires are connected with 'eternal' values, especially religion, and are symbolized by forms of conversion, the conjuring of sorcerers and demons, and the expulsion of evil. To stress this historical role, the hero is usually endowed with objects that indicate his chosenness, such as magical weapons or horses that once belonged to legendary predecessors. Sometimes they receive titles that link them to a glorious past or to legendary heroes. This enhances their legitimacy by linking them to history, tradition, and legend, and the collective memory of the community. They are not only invincible; they are rightly so, because they represent the combination of virtue and strength as it has been sanctified by history.

[4] The story line of the narrative is usually set in motion by a disruption, such as the death of a king/father, or the looming fall of the dynasty, or something of the kind. The hero represents the force of continuity and reconstruction, of the revitalization of ancient values that are the foundations of the community. In some cases he is at the beginning of this history, as the co-founder of a nation.

[5] The hero is in some way solitary in his supreme prowess, but he is always surrounded by loyal comrades, helpers, and adjutants. Some of these have stereotypical roles, such as the loyal friend, the trickster, the gluttonous bully, etc. The hero thus forms a kind of band based on sworn loyalty and a division of tasks, which, of course, are helpful in the design of the plots, the breaking of stalemates, and the resolution of intricate situations. A special role is usually reserved to women, either as helpers or as beloveds, or both. Women, too, of course, represent forms of legitimacy and continuity, through their position, descent, and offspring.

[6] A crucial element in the stories is the enemy personified by a foreign king, a wicked vizier, or a rebellious governor. In several cases the hero is him-

self not the ruler. This produces a complex set of relationships between the various components of the power structure, each representing a specific form of power. As we will see, it is within this complexity that notions of power and authority are defined, precisely because of the differentiation it implies. Needless to say, the villains are stereotypes, too, personifying the very essence of evil.

[7] Finally, the story usually unfolds within certain demarcations indicated by cultural or geographical boundaries. These boundaries can be used merely as a device to construct the story, creating differences, oppositions, (im)possibilities, obstacles, etc., but they can also be used as a means to indicate adherence to specific communities, thus embedding the struggles and the structures of power and authority within a specific milieu. This milieu may be linked to all kinds of communal identifications: political, cultural, religious, or historical. It is here, together with other historical references, that a certain legitimation is sought and the ideological significance of the narrative is articulated.

In the following sections these basic elements of the chivalric romance will be regularly referred to, although, as remarked above, they are not equally relevant for all cases. Still, in the conclusion at the end of our analysis we will be able to point to some remarkable similarities. For our discussion we have selected six romances, from the European, Persian/Urdu, Chinese, Arabic, Malay, and Turkish traditions. All of the texts have ancient roots in previous literary works or trends, but have also survived at least until the rise of early modernity, proving their resilience to innovative trends or their ability to assimilate new elements and tastes. They all hover in the diffuse area between official and popular discourses in the various aspects determined in the introduction.

Tirant lo Blanc: The Ideal Knight

One of the landmarks in the history of European literature, and probably in world literature as a whole, was the appearance of Cervantes's masterpiece *Don Quijote de la Mancha* in 1605/15. The work is not only immensely fascinating in itself, but also marks the transition from medieval literature—especially romances of chivalry—to (pre)modern literature, which came to be dominated, over the course of time, by various forms of the novel. It closes the period of the great romances, which thrived in medieval Europe, and opens up new vistas of literary art based on a new perception of literature. One of the interesting aspects of *Don Quijote* is that it is apparently itself conscious of

FIGURE 5 *Yue Fei's mother tattooing Yue Fei, Beijing Summer Palace, 18th century.*

its innovative role. It not only presents a parody of the literary genre it aims to replace, the author also comments on the literature of his time and suggests a literary background that is both culturally and narratively complex. Whatever may have happened afterwards, *Don Quijote*, as a work of literature, is a monument indicating and representing new outlooks on life and history.

One of the literary works discussed and praised by Cervantes is the Catalan romance *Tirant lo Blanc*, which was initially written by Juanot Martorell and completed by Marti Joan de Galba, and which appeared in print in 1490. It was translated into Castillian in 1511 and into Italian in 1538, 1566, and 1611. It subsequently became known throughout Europe. The work was written in a period when Catalan culture and literature witnessed a remarkable upsurge in the work of Ramon Llull (1233?–1316?) and Ramon Muntaner (1265–1336), and the romance *Curial e Güelfa* (app. 1460). This new cultural effervescence was, of course, related to the prominent role of Catalan towns in the Mediterranean trade networks of that time. It is partly inspired by the adventures of Roger de Flor, who, with a following of Catalans, undertook an expedition to the Levant and for several years settled in Macedonia, entangled in the many intrigues surrounding the Byzantine emperor and his struggle against the Muslims. He wrote an account of this expedition, which in outline resembles the martial exploits of Tirant. Another source was Ramon Llull's *Llibre de l'Orde de Cavalleria* (Book of the order of chivalry, 1274–1276) which is an elaborate compendium for the order of knights in Europe.

These references indicate that the narrative of *Tirant* has clear roots in its historical context. It refers to historical figures, albeit fictionalized, and clearly reflects a historical situation, both the state of the chivalric 'class' in the late Middle Ages and the political and military challenges relating to Constantinople, which was conquered by the Ottomans in 1453. The loss of Constantinople was, of course, a major setback for the European/Christian kings and was

everywhere interpreted as an event of almost apocalyptic proportions. The many epic stories that emerged in Europe in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, which often involved expeditions to Constantinople, can be seen as an effort to reconquer the city within the literary imagination, or at least to assert some rights to the area from a Christian perspective. The Grand Turk replaced the Saracens as the great Muslim threat to Christianity after the last bulwark against Islam had fallen.

The historical framework of the romance has a bearing on its narrative concept. The story is different from the medieval romances in the sense that it is less abstract and romanticized and the characters are (relatively) less emblematic, a realism praised by Cervantes. The book is an inventory of the ideals of knighthood, which have developed into its ultimate sophistication, while becoming increasingly outdated at the same time. The virtues of the knights are celebrated, but the reader knows that the era of the valiant warrior is past and has been overtaken by history. The values expressed in the work have developed more in the direction of a pristine humanism, with a sense of realism, a concern for details of personalities, and a tendency to see characters not merely as passive vehicles for the story. Descriptions of scenes and persons can be remarkably detailed; emotions and contemplations are elaborated upon; and supernatural phenomena are almost completely absent. The novel thus finds itself, like *Don Quijote*, on the boundary between the medieval romance and the (pre)modern novel.

Still, in spite of these 'modern' features, the writer links the story quite explicitly to the European chivalric tradition. The story opens with an episode relating the adventures of the English knight William of Warwick, the 'father of knighthood', who explains to the reader the origin, vocation, tests, weapons, and customs of the phenomenon of knighthood. We learn that William went on pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem and subsequently disappeared, giving rise to the rumour of his death. He has retired to an isolated cabin in England to atone for his sins. However, when the English king is defeated by an invading band of Moors, he (the king) sees a bearded man in a frock taking charge of the army. When he meets William—whom he does not recognize—he asks him to lead his army. He even descends from the throne to allow William to assume the corresponding dignity. William consents and a document is drawn as proof of the transaction. Because he knows Arabic and has learned how to use explosives, William succeeds in expelling the Moors, and after his victory the king is restored to the throne.

Next, we are told how a lonely traveller falls asleep while riding his horse and is taken to a hermit—William—who is reading the *Tree of the martial arts*. This is Tirant lo Blanc, a Breton nobleman, on his way to the English court to

take part in a tournament. William reads passages from the book to Tirant, explaining to him the basic rules of knighthood, the symbolism of weapons, and the traditions of warriors from the Bible, Antiquity, and the Middle Ages. Armed with this knowledge, Tirant continues his journey to the court of the English king, where knights from all over Europe gather to prove their prowess. They have to swear an oath:

> Oh gentleman received into the knightly order, do you swear before God and on the four Gospels never to contravene the most lofty and excellent King of England except in the service of your natural lord, and then only after returning the chain with his arms that he now places upon your neck? Only thus may you oppose him without incurring worthy knights' reproaches, for otherwise you will commit treason and deserve ill repute, and should you be taken prisoner, you will risk death at his hands. Therefore, do you now swear to champion ladies, widows, orphans, damsels in distress, and also married ones, should they request your aid, cheerfully braving death if one or more of these should call upon you?[1]

Of course, Tirant beats all his rivals and is formally incorporated into the knightly Order of the Garter, newly founded by the king. The young knight sets out to discover the world, and after some adventures around the island of Rhodes and a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and Alexandria, Tirant is asked by the emperor of Constantinople to help him in his struggle against the Turks. Tirant makes his preparations, equips a ship, and sets sail to the east. His real adventures start here.

The remainder of the narrative can be divided into two parts: first, Tirant's adventures as a general of the Byzantine army, his struggle against the Turks, the intrigues with the Greek noblemen, and his love for princess Carmesina; and, second, his adventures in North Africa, after his ship is blown off course to the African coast by a sudden storm. Here he becomes involved in wars between the regional kings, whom he finally converts to Christianity. The African episode, like Gharib's excursion to the realm of the jinns, is interesting in itself, but it is mainly an intermezzo inserted into the main story, which takes place in and around Constantinople. Tirant succeeds in repelling the Turkish troops from Byzantine territory and concluding an advantageous peace treaty. He also succeeds in conquering the heart of princess Carmesina, the daughter

1 Joanot Martorell and Martí Joan de Galba, *Tirant lo Blanc*, trans. David H. Rosenthal (London, 1984) 74.

of the Byzantine emperor, who is actually the main protagonist after Tirant. Just after Carmesina has become his bride, however, Tirant falls ill and dies. The princess and the emperor also die, of grief.

Although, as said above, *Tirant lo Blanc* is in several respects more complex than the average romance of chivalry, it exhibits some of its basic narrative structures. The story begins with a transition, in which the young hero Tirant, apparently guided by fate, meets the old warrior William of Warwick, who instructs him on the principles of knighthood, based on his own experiences as a knight and on the established rules and conventions laid down in books and history. Thus, the interruption of a tradition is prevented, and Tirant is provided with the knowledge required for his role, just as a young prince may receive instruction before he succeeds his father. Like many motifs of this kind, the knowledge is conveyed through dialogue, making use of references to texts of a specific kind. After this introduction the story is constructed basically as the conventional adventure trope in which the intrepid hero is catapulted towards the scenes of his destiny by his unbounded ambition, conquering obstructions on the way and unfailingly realizing all his projected aims, being rewarded in the end with the legal possession of his beloved. His being blown off course and away from the main story is a typical device of the contingency of the adventure trope. Still, this skeleton of the story is fleshed out to such an extent that the mechanical dynamics of the story and the emblematic nature of Tirant as a narrative character are enriched not only with elaborate and detailed descriptions, but also by the efforts to mould Tirant into a more or less realistic hero, who has his feelings and doubts, his weak spots and his adversities. He is the paragon of virtue and righteousness, but he is also a man trying persistently to still his desire for Carmesina, even breaking a leg in an attempt to steal into her bedroom.

A significant element enhancing the realistic impression of the story is the framing of events within formal transactions and documents. This starts immediately at the beginning, when William of Warwick uses the chivalric handbooks as an authoritative source. During the tournament at the English court not only is an oath taken by the participants; the whole struggle is regulated by formalities and functionaries, such as 'weapon kings', judges, and notaries. Some of the participants have a special official certificate issued in Rome by cardinals and clerics, proving that they are genuine knights 'of four quarters' (father, mother, grandfather, grandmother). The foundation of the Order of the Garter is also recorded in documents, including the oath, the proscriptions, the grants, the pledge of faith, the protection of the Holy Land and of women, and the membership of a number of ladies. This inclination towards formalities was apparently a new phenomenon, which was not wel-

comed by the author, since he has the English king kill all the jurists because their only aim is to enrich themselves. The advice is 'to allow only two jurists in the whole country, who in all cases have to conclude with a sufficient verdict within fourteen days'.[2] They should receive a salary so that they will not take bribes.

In spite of all the efforts to imbue the story with a sense of realism, Tirant is still sufficiently 'super-human' to fulfil his role in the story. He is not only privileged as a chosen knight through his initiation by William, the quintessential knight; he is also strong, courageous, and intelligent, full of self-confidence—which melts away only in the face of love—and with an unflagging sense of purpose. He is righteous and charismatic, conscientious and just, and caring for the common people. He is not interested in earthly possessions or status, but only in his prestige as a knight: His only possessions are honour, weapons, and a horse. His task is to obey and to assist: to obey his king and the Holy Church and to protect their interests wherever he can, remaining faithful to his oath. Honour is self-evidently related to religion: every action and transaction is accompanied by Holy Masses and other ritual celebrations, and Tirant's mission is triggered by his hearing a messenger who reports that the Turks have invaded Constantinople and are refurbishing the cathedral as a stable for horses. Although the emperor seems to acquiesce in his misfortune, a knight should jump up and defend the Church and the people of God. Other religious motifs are Tirant's pilgrimage, the thorn of Jesus's crown preserved in the castle of Rhodes, and many conversions.

Religion is not only at the heart of Tirant's mission in life; it is also what distinguishes good from evil, the just cause from its enemies, God's community from its attackers. The personification of evil is, of course, the Ottoman sultan and his army commander called the 'Grand Turk'. The Turks are not only accused of violating Byzantine territory, abducting Christian children, and threatening to convert churches into stables; they are also the archenemy of the faith, the adherents to a false belief. The sultan is in league with the kings of Asia, Africa, Cappadocia, Armenia, India, and Egypt, as the head of a political coalition, and therefore is the embodiment of the false and objectionable faith of Muhammad. During his struggle in Africa, fighting the combined forces of the kings of Bejaïa, Fez, Persia, Tana, Nether-India, Damascus, Granada, and Tunis, Tirant delivers a passionate tirade against the Muslims, who seek their happiness in gluttony and adultery, as exemplified by the dissolute 'swine' and deceiver Muhammad. It is a faith in contradiction to reason, meant for

2 Ibid., 57.

irrational animals. Tirant refers to Aristotle, Preacher 23, John 12, Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, and Proverbs 6. When he has finished, 340,000 Moors are willing to convert.

The enemy is defined not only as a religious community, but also geographically, although the demarcations are a strange mixture of vague and imprecise indications. Opposite the Asian/African realm of the 'heathens' stands a mosaic of European kingdoms. At the joust in England knights participate from France, Poland, Bavaria, Burgundy, Austria, Aragon, Castile, Portugal, Navarra, Exeter, Wales, Bedford, and Friesland. Although the name Europe is not mentioned, it is clear that the tradition of knighthood and, perhaps more importantly, the networks of knights and knightly courts were seen as a common European phenomenon. But since it was ideologically unified by the common faith, it was the head of Christendom, the Emperor of Constantinople, who represented the paramount position and the symbolic authority within this common tradition. This is partly due, of course, to the heritage of the Middle Ages and the tradition of the Crusades. In *Tirant*, too, the oath to fight for the Holy Land was a crucial part of the chivalric code.

The realm of the Christians is therefore imagined in a rather ambivalent way, combining symbolic, religious, geographic, and political elements. There is no strict unity. Tirant scolds the perfidious Genuese, Lombards, and Italians, who conspire with the Turks. Conversely, some Turks are depicted as civilized, trustworthy men, eloquent, brave, wise, and decent. Politically, the rather inchoate mixture of Byzantine nobles and the auxiliary troops from the European kingdoms, led by their various commanders, is regulated through functions and ranks, integrating, to some extent, the different hierarchies involved. This is symbolized, too, by ceremonies and paraphernalia, such as the various crowns: the duke wears a silver crown; the count a leather crown; the marquis a steel crown; the king a golden crown; and the emperor has seven golden crowns. This hierarchic division of external marks reveals a differentiation within a single system unifying the empire with the European kingdoms based on the common codes of knighthood.

A curious episode occurs when a court meeting in Constantinople is surprised by a visit from Morgana, the sister of King Arthur, who is desperately searching for her brother. The emperor leads her to a dungeon where a knight with the sword Excalibur resides. The knight, who is King Arthur, speaks about the condition of royal dignity, the properties of ladies, the eight 'natural gifts', the oath of enthronement, the origin of honour, and the duties of warriors, the prince, and the vassals. After his lecture Morgana leaves Constantinople and Arthur is not mentioned again. It is not explicated what this passage is meant to add, but it seems to have been inserted to emphasize the link between

the Byzantine Emperor and the heritage of the great, quintessential king of the Christian realm, and, additionally, of the European literary tradition. If the codes of chivalry are evoked recurrently throughout the book, suggesting that it is the tradition of knighthood that is reiterated, celebrated, and preserved within the narrative, it is this staging of the legendary king that reveals various manifestations of the tradition. There is a line connecting King Arthur with the Byzantine Emperor, and it is upheld by the tradition of chivalry. It is here that the various strands within the discourse of kingship in *Tirant* converge: the tradition of knighthood, the great European kings, and the symbolic authority of the Byzantine Emperor. Tirant personifies the values inherent in this system and also serves as a medium connecting and conveying them, as an indispensable support for the system and its main symbol, the Byzantine Emperor.

Before we proceed with our discussion of other romances, a final note should be added about the role of women in the story of *Tirant*. In contrast to most of the texts discussed above, in *Tirant*, as in other romances, the role of women is not essentially negative. From the beginning it is made clear that women have a specific position within the chivalric system, mainly as ladies to whom the knight dedicates his exploits, but also, within court circles, as the beloveds of the knights. The formation of love pairs is attributed to love and passion, but it is obviously governed by hierarchies, ranks, and conventions, and, to be sure, by narrative patterns that impose a certain balance between the characters. It is no coincidence, of course, that Tirant catches the highest prize, the gorgeous princess Carmesina. His courting of the princess occupies a substantial part of the narrative. For reasons of propriety, the relationship between the two lovers is hampered by conventions, delay, misunderstandings, and deliberations. Repeatedly debates are inserted about the condition of love and the nature of women, in which references to examples from Antiquity abound. The mighty warrior Tirant, who never recoils before any danger, is clearly dumbstruck by the force of his emotions and becomes like wax in the hands of his beloved. Carmesina, too, elaborately reflects on her desires, and the youthful vitality of the couple results in a number of erotic trysts, which are remarkably explicitly described. The erotic scenes are so vivid that one can see why the reading of romances of this kind was discouraged for young ladies and men.

In spite of Cervantes's scorn of the romance of chivalry, and *Tirant*'s heralding of a new literary era, the genre experienced a revival in Europe in the sixteenth century. As we will see below, some story-cycles, such as the *Amadis* and *Palmerin d'Oliva* series, became enormously popular throughout Europe. Originating in the Iberian Peninsula, they were translated into several languages and were read primarily in court circles, but also by a wider audience. These

novels, like *Tirant*, are situated mainly in the Mediterranean basin and are constructed around the confrontation with the Turks and the fall of Constantinople. Although the romance of chivalry died out after the sixteenth century, as we will see, the themes of the struggle against the rival faith and of the glory of knighthood remained popular in European literature throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and up to the novels of Walter Scott. The main focus of the works shifted, but the notion of warfare and adventure remained fascinating and relevant, and resulted in various forms of medievalism and orientalism.

The Harbinger of the Faith: Amir Hamza

In Muslim Asia, the genre of the heroic romance is dominated by two major clusters of texts: the Alexander romance, in its various appearances, and the *Shahnama* written by Firdawsi in the tenth century. These works were, so to speak, centres around which the material of narrative traditions coalesced to form nodal points and vehicles for transmission and presentation. They provided narrative models, characters, and intrigues, which could be endlessly elaborated upon or from which storytellers could freely derive their material to construct new narratives suitable for their times. Gradually a reservoir of material was formed that, because of the succeeding waves of linguistic and cultural amalgamation, fed into the chivalric traditions in Persian, Urdu, Turkish, and Arabic, and even Malay and Javanese. These traditions obviously evolved over the course of history; they cluster around historical figures and reveal the interactions between oral and written, and official and popular forms of literature.

One of the most well-known Asian romances is the *Hamzanama*, or the *Book of Amir Hamza*. The origins of this narrative are lost in the shades of history, but some scholars trace them back to the court of the Ghaznavid Sultan Mahmud (971–1030), who founded the first Muslim kingdom in Afghanistan. The work emerged in the full light of history during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605), who had an illustrated copy of a Persian text made, containing a great number of large, quite spectacular, miniatures. The book was subsequently stolen by the Persian Sultan Nadir Shah Afshar (1688–1747), the last Persian king to invade India. The romance remained popular among storytellers and poets in India, Afghanistan, and Persia during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and its popularity has endured even until the present day. The text has been preserved in Persian and Urdu versions in manuscripts from the eighteenth century. These texts are roughly the same, but differ from

the Arabic versions titled *Qissa amir Hamza al-Bahlawan*. In 1855 the Urdu text was edited by Ghalib Lakhnavi, and in 1871 this text was revised by Abdullah Bilgrami. It was translated into English in 2007 by Musharraf Ali Farooqi. The version that is extant is thus rather new, but as we will see, it has retained the traces of its long and rich history, combining ancient motifs with later additions and preserving not only a treasure of narrative material, but also the core plots and themes. Our discussion will be based on the English translation by Farooqi.

The main protagonist of the story is Hamza, the son of the paternal uncle of the Prophet Muhammad, Abd al-Muttalib. Hamza was thus a historical figure from the time of the prophet, who was killed in the battle of Uhud in 625 by a woman named Hind, in revenge for the death of her father. The other main character is the Sassanid Emperor Anusherwan I, the Just, who reigned between 531 and 579, that is, just before the birth of Muhammad. As in 'Ajib and Gharib', the narrative therefore predates the revelation of the Qur'an, although Hamza already prefigures the values and spirit of Islam and strives for the conversion of the Persian Fire-worshippers to the true faith. Like Gharib, he embodies God's plan and the course of history before the revelation, and the main theme of the story is the struggle between an old order, represented by the Sassanid Emperor, and the heralds of a new era. Unlike Gharib, but similar to Tirant, Hamza is not predestined to become the new king. He remains the loyal servant of the powers that be, revealing the inherent deficiencies of the old order and preparing the establishment of a new order without himself toppling the emperor or taking his place.

The story begins with an introductory episode in the reign of Anusherwan's father Qubad Kamran, Emperor of the Seven Concentric Circles (Climes) and of the world, who rules in Ctesiphon, its capital. It is a time of justice and prosperity; the king is even more courageous than the legendary hero Rustam, and his forty viziers are wise and well versed in physics, arithmetic, geomancy, divination, and astrology, outshining even Aristotle, Plato, Galen, Euclid, and Pythagoras. He has a sage, Bakht Jamal, who is a descendant of Danyal and who excels in the occult sciences. A prophecy reveals to Bakht Jamal that in the next forty days he should not leave his house, because misfortune looms. The sage stays at home for thirty-nine days, but on the fortieth day he goes out to visit his disciple Alqash. On the way he coincidentally finds a cellar with the seven treasures of the legendary Arabian King Shaddad. He reports his find to Alqash, who kills him, buys the property, and has a garden planted over the cellar. The wife of Bakht Jamal is pregnant and gives birth to a splendid child whom she calls Buzurjmehr. When he grows up she tells him: 'Son, your father left us nothing that I can spare to be sold for meat and drink. But on the

shelf there lies an ancient book, belonging to my father, and written long ago. Many a time, when your father was in need of money, he resolved to sell it. But every time he reached for it, a black serpent would dart out hissing from the shelf.'[3]

The book of his grandfather is a magical text that shows Buzurjmehr the past and the future; he reads that his father was killed by Alqash, that he will revenge his death, and that he will become a vizier. Buzurjmehr becomes a pious and clairvoyant sage, the grandson of Hakim Jamasp, and Alqash intends to kill him. When the emperor has a dream, Buzurjmehr has the opportunity to show his skills. He explains the dream and exposes Alqash. He receives the vizier's robe and permission to be seated on the right side of the throne. According to the emperor, Buzurjmehr is versed in etymology, syntax, logic, ethics, mathematics, rhetoric, astronomy, geometry, letters, arithmetic, philosophy, geomancy, astrology, statecraft, economics, etiquette, and finances. The daughter of Alqash is married to a slave and the couple has a son. The emperor wants to have the child killed, but Buzurjmehr stops him and promises to educate the boy to become a vizier. His name is Bakhtak, and he will become the bitter adversary of Buzurjmehr, permanently conspiring against him to thwart his plans.

At the same time the emperor's spouse is pregnant. To ascertain the precise moment of birth, Buzurjmeher puts before him Indian, European, Dutch, and Gaelic clocks and observes the stars. The signs tell him that the prince will reign for seventy years; that he will be counteracted by his vizier; and that his name will be Anusherwan. When the boy grows up, Qubad Kamran wants to abdicate in favour of him, but Buzurjmehr first asks permission to educate him. The boy is entrusted to him for forty days, in which he imprisons him, beats him, and humiliates him. Afterwards Buzurjmehr offers the boy his neck to be beheaded, but the prince, thoroughly disciplined, spares him. Two years later Anusherwan accedes to the throne. After some time Anusherwan has a dream and Buzurjmehr explains to him that a hero will come from Mecca who will save the empire from its enemies. Buzurjmehr journeys to Mecca to look for him. When he finds him, he sees that 'he is destined to extract tribute from the emperors of the Seven Climes and conquer the whole world: he who would humble the great and mighty on Earth and Mount Qaf.'[4] He calls the boy Hamza.

---

3 Ghalib Lakhnavi and Abdullah Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, trans. Musharraf Ali Farooqi (New York, 2007) 10.

4 Ibid., 60.

Simultaneous with Hamza's birth, two other boys are born: Muqbil Vafadar, who will become an unsurpassed archer, and Amar, who will become a trickster full of cunning, guile, and deceit, cruel and cold-hearted. Both will be trusted and loyal friends of Hamza for the duration of his adventurous life. Hamza's birth is also noticed by Shahpal ibn Shahrukh, the great king of the jinns, sitting on Sulayman's throne and governing the realm of the peris, devs, Ghuls, shutor-pas, Gaosars, Gostifils, Nim-tans, tasma-pas, Ghurmunhas, and other demons. The jinns fetch Hamza from his cradle and take him to the Qaf Mountains, where his eyes are lined with the collyrium of Sulayman. When Hamza grows up, he encounters another distinguished visitor. A veiled rider approaches him and hands him the horse of the Prophet Ishaq, named Siyah Qitas. Moreover, the strange figure—who turns out to be the archangel Gabriel—says to him:

> As it is ordained by the Omnipotent One, I make you my favoured one, and pronounce this blessing that no warrior will ever overcome you, and the height of your prestige shall forever remain ascendant over your opponent's. [...] Remove that stone standing on the heap over yonder, and dig in the earth underneath. It will reveal a chest containing the arms and armour of the prophets.[5]

In the crypt Hamza finds the vest of Ismail (Ismael), the helmet of the Prophet Hud, the chainmail of Daud (David), the arm guard of Yusuf (Joseph), the ankle guards of the Prophet Saleh, the cummerbund and dagger of the hero Rustam, magic swords of the jinns Samsam and Qumqam of Barkhiyya, the shield of Garshasp, the mace of Sam bin Nariman, the scimitar of Sohrab (all legendary heroes), and the lance of Nuh (Noah).[6]

Hamza's loyal friend, the rascal Amar, is visited by the Prophet Khizr (al-Khadir), who endows him with the gift that nobody will ever walk faster than he. Muqbil receives the help of the lion of God, the Exalted One, Sahib-e Hal Ata, the Feller of Khaibar's Fort, the Second of the Five Holies (Qur'an 76:8), that is, Ali ibn Abi Talib, the cousin of the prophet and the fourth caliph. During his first expeditions to defeat rebellious kings, Hamza meets a number of rulers and robbers, whom he converts to the true faith and who join his entourage. One of them is the Rabelaisian giant Adi Madi-Karib, who has an enormous, massive arse, and devours twenty-one camels in the morning, twenty-one deer

5 Ibid., 89.

6 Ibid.

and twenty-one sheep in the afternoon, washed down with twenty-one flacons of wine, and twenty-one camels, twenty-one deer, sheep, and buffaloes, with bread, in the evening. Adi will become Hamza's loyal, albeit somewhat uncouth and recalcitrant, friend.

In the meantime, the Persian Empire is attacked by a foreign army. The Persians are defeated, and the enemy advances towards Mecca. Hamza confronts their commander Hashsham, and, after shouting 'None but God alone is powerful!', he smashes his cranium into splinters. Hamza writes a letter to Anusherwan, to offer his help in restoring the Persian throne, but it is intercepted by Bakhtak, who through falsifying the correspondence creates enmity between the emperor and Hamza. However, Buzurjmehr intervenes. He contrives a dragon-shaped standard, which, when the wind blows into it, produces the yell 'O Sahibqiran!', meaning, 'O Lord of the Auspicious Planetary Conjunction!', which was once the epithet of Alexander the Great. He presents it to Hamza, with a tent that belonged to Danyal and that gives protection against sorcery. Amar receives a costume of trickery, hiding 444 objects, along with a cloth to cover his testicles, daggers, false whiskers, a naphta flask, a blend of medicinal potions, lip balm, a fly whisk, and a deadly sword. He is taught twelve musical styles and some songs and receives the titles Father of Racers, Lord of Mischief-Mongers of the World, and King of Dagger-Throwing Tricksters.

Thereupon Hamza and his followers advance towards Ctesiphon—Hamza combatting a lion on the way—while the Persians quiver in fear. Hamza, still a beardless but beautiful lad of sixteen, dramatically enters the royal hall:

> Amir Hamza bore on his head the Throne of Kai-Khusrau, which the hell-bound Hashsham had plundered from Ctesiphon, and submitted it into the emperor's presence, along with the crown and other regalia of the empire. Amir had borne the throne on his head because when Emperor Kai-Khusrau had vanquished Turan and then occupied Iran, to render homage to the emperor, Rustam bin Zal had walked thirty steps bearing the throne on his head. In like manner Amir showed regard for Naushervan by carrying the throne on his head for forty steps—sporting it like the aigrette in his turban—to declare that he was ten times more powerful than Rustam, the champion Warrior of the World, and the Reigning Lord of the Powers of Time.[7]

7 Ibid., 136.

Subsequently, he seats himself on the chair of Rustam, next to the throne, while 'a shaft of grief pierced the hearts of the Sassanids' because of his boldness.[8]

Inevitably, one day, Princess Mehr-Nigar, daughter of Anusherwan and a Chinese princess, observes Hamza while he is bathing, and falls in love with him. He also falls in love with her and secretly steals into her bedroom. The two start courting each other, and Hamza teaches her the 'vow of fidelity to the One God and the Act of Faith'.[9] He asks her hand from Anusherwan, but the emperor, fearing his might, promises his daughter in marriage to whoever brings the rebellious Indian King Landhoor as a prisoner before him. Hamza immediately embarks for Ceylon, but Amar fears the jinns and magic of India, and the dangerous seas. Amar subsequently experiences some miraculous sea adventures resembling those of Sindbad of the Sea in the *Thousand and one nights* (the 'old man of the sea', the whirlpool of Alexander). From Khizr he receives the Timbal of Sikander (Alexander), as a present for the Sahibqiran. Meanwhile, Hamza has some strange experiences, too. He is presented with magical objects by prophetical figures—including Muhammad—and is allowed the wish that he will die only after he has asked three times for it. In a dream he receives a code of conduct, including the rules: never start a fight himself, never kill a noble soul, never pursue a fleeing enemy, always offer reprieve to one who asks for it, never turn a mendicant from his door, weed out infidelity, and never be an instrument of hurt for the poor and the weak.[10]

Hamza is now fully equipped to perform his exploits. His expeditions in the service of Anusherwan take him to India, Egypt, Syria, Turkey, and Greece, where he either defeats evil enemies, or, more frequently, persuades the rulers to embrace the true faith and join his troops. The kings of India and China, in particular, become his faithful allies. He is helped by the endless tricks of Amar, who, moreover, speaks Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Kashmiri, Pashto, Maghrebi, Ethiopian, Zanzibarian, English, Portuguese, French, Russian, Latin, Greek, Hindi, Karnataki, Bhojpuri, Deccani, Chinese, Tartar, Rangari, and Sindhi, apart from the special trickster-language of the Ayyar, the community of tricksters and rogues. Hamza is obstructed by Bakhtak, who feeds the suspicions of Anusherwan, but each time he is saved by Buzurjmehr, who at some point turns out to have accepted the true faith. The marriage between Hamza and Mehr-Nigar keeps being postponed, either because of Bakhtak's intrigues or

8 Ibid., 140.

9 Ibid., 193.

10 Ibid., 233.

after oaths by Hamza not to marry her before he has fulfilled some task. In the end Hamza abducts her from Ctesiphon and sends her to Mecca.

In a long intermezzo, Hamza is magically transported to Mount Qaf to help King Shahpal in his struggle against rebellious jinns. Here, too, Hamza proves his invincibility by defeating ferocious ghouls and fearsome monsters and, above all, by neutralizing all kinds of talismans and enchantments. These are specially designed to delay his return to the human world, because Princess Aasman peri has become enamoured of him. The story provides a colourful array of miraculous elements and references to the legends of Sulayman and the jinns. Finally, Hamza succeeds in escaping from the realm of the jinns by flying over the Seven Seas on the back of the bird Simurgh and hanging from the claws of the bird Rukh. He is shown thirty-nine of the Forty Wonders of Sulayman, but he disobediently opens the fortieth door as well. In the many years of Hamza's absence, Amar protects Mehr-Nigar against Hamza's many enemies and uses all his tricks to hold out until Hamza's return. In some threatening situation he is saved by a mysterious, veiled, figure, who turns out to be a peri. After Hamza's return he hears from Buzurjmehr about the birth of the prophet. He travels to Mecca to kiss the feet of Muhammad and to offer him his service, as a warrior in his army. Finally, he is decapitated by Hind.

This summary shows that the story of Hamza neatly conforms to the generic type sketched above and even includes motifs from other genres discussed in previous chapters. First, the story starts with a play between disruption and continuity, focused on the figure of the vizier and referring emphatically to forms of esoteric knowledge, in a way that shows affinity with the material of the story of the 'Queen of the Serpents', discussed above. The introduction not only emphasizes the necessity of continuing an ancient tradition; it also outlines the main theme of the narrative, the emergence of the forces of good and evil, juxtaposed in continuous competition to steer the course of events. This clear division of roles predicts a rather emblematic set of characters, and, in fact, Hamza shows no signs of psychological depth or development; at sixteen he is already the fully grown, invincible, hero that he will remain until the end of the story. The other characters, too, are enacting their prescribed roles within the labyrinth of events, revealing a form of evolution only when they, impressed by Hamza's prowess, embrace the true faith. There is a continuous parade of villains and heroes, fighting each other with various means, drawing all kinds of motifs and narrative material into the story as if it were their only function.

Hamza's emblematic role is completely absorbed by his function as trailblazer for the prophet and the spread of the faith. Although the story is set before the advent of the prophet, it is already filled with elements of Islam,

from the *shahada* to prayer and ablution, from references to the Qur'an (the *fatiha*) to the notion of conversion, the Oneness of God, and other doctrines. On top of that, Hamza is visited by Gabriel, granting him almost prophetic status. Ali even appears before Muqbil before he is born. These elements are not only inspired by the narrative conventions that require the story to be infused with some pre-established ideological concept; they also indicate the essential timelessness of God's message and its connection with the time-bound nature of human life. God's scheme already exists, but its earthly manifestation still has to unfold. Still, whatever happens is part of a larger, even transcendental plan. This is shown, too, by the symbolic attributes that Hamza receives and that render him into one of the few chosen heroes to be instrumental in the realization of God's plan.

As in the case of Tirant, Hamza's religious connotations are contrasted to those of his opponents. The introduction of the narrative shows how the Sassanid court is steeped in ancient wisdom, science, and philosophy, but it is still clinging to false beliefs and superstition. Whereas Hamza already swears by the one God, Anusherwan makes 'a gratuitous prostration to his one hundred and seventy-five gods'.[11] He and others are used to invoke, rather implausibly, the goddesses al-Lat and al-Manat, who were venerated in Mecca in pre-Islamic times and who were emphatically denounced by Muhammad. Furthermore, the Persians are Fire-worshippers who swear by the fire temple of Namrud. In a period of adversity, Anusherwan even abdicates the throne and retires to a fire temple to perform humble services to the 'idols' there. Hamza repeatedly summons him to accept the true faith, but Anusherwan refuses to relinquish the traditions of the dynasty and only in the very end does he concede to convert.

Religion is thus a clear identity marker delimiting communities and defining cultural and political boundaries. Anusherwan explicitly links religious matters with the interests of the dynasty, and when Hamza is courting Mehr-Nigar, her nanny cautions her: 'Many Sassanid and Kianid princes have sought your hand in marriage. This is a follower of the True Faith, someone who shares neither your faith nor your language. In my view it is improper for you to attach and tie yourself to him!'[12] Bakhtak, the wicked vizier, agrees with her: 'Emperor of the Seven Climes was loath to marry his daughter to Hamza, and those who heard it agreed that indeed the emperor could not have given his daughter in marriage to someone who did not speak the same language and who worshipped an

11 Ibid., 141.

12 Ibid., 184.

invisible God.'[13] Obviously, cultural and religious boundaries reinforce one another and are related to the political stability of the empire. When Hamza advances to Ctesiphon to restore the Persian throne after the setback against Hashsham, the Persians are afraid: 'These Arabs are a most rebellious lot and show great ambitions and giddiness of mind.'[14] They fear a revolt with a clear ethnic component. It is evident that when Hamza theatrically carries in the throne and seats himself on Rustam's chair, the Persians consider this gesture as a humiliation and an act of sedition.

There is one force that can overcome all these boundaries and demarcations, and that is the irresistible spread of the true faith by Hamza's efforts, even before it was revealed. Hamza's expeditions in East and West show how ethnic and cultural differences are irrelevant for the adoption of the faith and for becoming an ally fighting for the lofty cause. Only Anusherwan remains obstinate until the end. The role of Hamza as an instrument of God is visible in his title Sahibqiran, 'Lord of the Auspicious Conjunction', that is, between Jupiter and Venus. It was an epithet associated with the great conqueror Alexander the Great taken on by the Mughal emperors of India. It is not only an honorary title for a conqueror or a warrior, but has millenary associations, too, as the figure whose destiny is linked to the cosmic forces and who is sent as a messiah to change the course of history. The Mughals used these elements to construct an image of themselves as the initiators of a new era and visionaries in touch with mystical and esoteric forces.[15] Hamza, too, is endowed with these powers to fulfil his task: ushering in a new era in human history.

The ideological connotations of the title Sahibqiran are perhaps somewhat paradoxical, since they would not easily harmonize with orthodox visions of the faith. As Moin argues in his study of Mughal kingship, they are rather rooted in the interface between official ideology and popular beliefs, creating a common ground for the framing of power and authority in the popular imagination. This is confirmed by the other symbolic elements in Hamza's image: his being chosen by Gabriel; his paraphernalia, such as the prophets' weapons and the magical horse; his connections with earlier prophets and heroes, etc. All these elements are part of religious and historical mythology, which have become part of popular lore. Likewise, there seems to be a contradiction in Hamza's acceptance of all the magical paraphernalia and his aversion to sorcery: 'I am the mortal foe of sorcery, cannibalism and infidels, and was born to

13 Ibid., 304.

14 Ibid., 125.

15 See Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*.

crush their vanity into the dust.'[16] Clearly, sorcerers rank among the quintessential barbarians and villains, but apparently there is a 'good' magic relating to the faith. When Hamza finds a book of magic, he destroys it, but Amar, the arch rascal, tears out a few pages; that is how sorcery spread throughout the world.

Hamza's disdain for sorcery does not prevent the narrator from inserting many supernatural episodes into his tale. In addition to the religious paraphernalia, these include, first of all, Hamza's adventures on Mount Qaf, part of the lore of the Prophet Sulayman, filled with magical landscapes, enchantments, monsters, metamorphoses, the compression of space and time, the emergence of mythical creatures, miraculous rescues, astrological signs, dreams, etc. These motifs are meant to incorporate the narrative into the tradition of mythology and legend, which is represented, in particular, by the figure of Jamasp, the Persian sage, and Sulayman, the king-prophet of the jinns and the natural phenomena, but also by Danyal, the guardian of esoteric sciences. The convergence of these traditions in the figure of Hamza enhances the ideological significance of the narrative, as a medium attracting elementary material, but it also construes Hamza as a symbolic character. It is also, to be sure, part of the generic conventions that govern this type of narrative; it serves as a repository of narrative material, which is thus transmitted to future generations. It is also, of course, included because it is a great source of entertainment: the world is full of wonders and strange phenomena. In this sense it is not surprising that the story contains many motifs and episodes that can also be found in the later versions of the *Thousand and one nights*, such as the stories of 'Sindbad', the 'City of Brass', 'Janshah' and others: they have similar functions and draw on the same reservoirs of narrative material.

It is these generic characteristics that are conducive to the narrative's ideological function. It is its hybridity between genres, between popular lore and imperial discourse, between religious history and legend that makes it such a powerful instrument for the construction of ideological discourses, or, perhaps more correctly, for ideological discourses to penetrate it and through it reach the popular imagination. As Moin explains, the work of holy men, storytellers, astrologers, and physicians produces 'key nodes of social knowledge and opinion formation', forms of 'affective knowledge, a window into local idioms of thought and opinion'. It creates 'spheres of autonomy within the polity', which put a check on the ruler's authority. Their 'strange' forms of knowledge—divination, dream interpretation, astrology, apocalyptic verse, morality tales,

16 Lakhnavi and Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, 890.

miracle stories, edifying epics, do not fit into respectable categories of religion or politics, but play 'an important role in the dissemination of political messages and news as well as in the formation of social memory'.[17]

But how are kingship and authority represented in the *Hamzanama*? In addition to the paradoxes mentioned above, it is paradoxical, too, that the narrative offers no picture of a Muslim king or of kingship in Islam. Whereas the story is meant to show the irresistible force of the new faith, the portrayal of kingship is bound to pre-Islamic times; when Anusherwan finally converts, the story comes to a close, and the reader is not informed about the nature of kingship henceforth. This may suggest a measure of uncertainty about what a Muslim king should look like and what Muslim rule exactly implies, resulting in a rather unsatisfactory compromise, a synthesis between ancient Persian kingship and the true faith. It may also indicate the essentially Asian setting of the story, in which the tradition of kingship is primarily Persian, to which an Islamic component is added. This latter supposition is confirmed by the conspicuous syncretism of the story, which is in line with the arguments of Moin concerning the amalgamation of Sunnite, Alid, esoteric, historical, and legendary elements into a newly forged cultural identity as a basis for royal authority.

A second observation is that the logic of the story is not built around the figure of the king as the most prominent protagonist, but around the hero-warrior. This narrative 'appropriation' of the central role is nicely played out in the story itself, in the tension between characters who represent different components of the structure of power: the king embodies an ancient dynasty, which is legitimized by history, by cosmic mechanisms, by the practice of just rule, and by the hierarchic organization; the hero, in contrast, has as his only legitimacy his physical force, his courage, his ingenuity, and, of course, his impersonation of a new vision, not yet sanctioned by tradition or history, nor, for that matter, by a proper revelation. The tension emerges because the two components' complementarity becomes acute: the empire is becoming weak; it is dissipated by internal strife and subdued by external forces. The symbol of this exhaustion is the stealing of the throne: the soul of the empire is torn out by irreverent villains who have no consideration for age-old traditions. The empire is on the verge of becoming obsolete and disappearing into the folds of history. In contrast, Hamza represents force and vitality, the charisma of a youthful faith, and a vision of the future. It seems only natural that these two extremes should be drawn to each other and somehow converge. This

17 Moin, *The Millennial Sovereign*, 69–70.

juxtaposition resembles Tirant's relationship with the Byzantine Emperor: he too is destined to imbue the empire with new vitality and a new lease on life. He, too, personifies the virtues that should be at the core of the empire and that should ensure a new, reinvigorated, rule.

Still, there is no reason to assume that a convergence between tradition, cultural and historical identity, weakness, and rejuvenation combined with a new vigorous worldview would be realized smoothly. After all, it touches upon the very basis of power and authority and the question of how power and authority can be moulded into a single ideological and societal whole. From the beginning, Anusherwan fears Hamza's power, which is expressed in his physical strength, his boldness, his charisma, and the autonomy of his war band. He is afraid that Hamza will usurp the throne and destroy the dynasty, and he is supported in this by his vizier Bakhtak. He is afraid that his traditional legitimacy cannot withstand Hamza's very practical power. Hamza, however, professes his loyalty to the emperor and sets out to restore his authority in all corners of the empire. Paradoxically, however, by doing this, by subduing refractory kings, he actually undermines the empire and increases his own power, because everywhere he adds new converts to the community of believers and builds new alliances with powerful kings. While buttressing the throne he is actually weakening the position of the emperor, because the latter stubbornly holds on to his old, obsolete, religion.

Although Hamza's power is steadily increasing, he remains loyal to the legitimate emperor. Repeatedly he declares his obedience: 'I am fully obedient to your commands, and regardless of everything am still faithful to you with all my heart and soul.'[18] And: 'Even though I have received nothing but harm from Naushervan's hands, I will continue to return his deeds with kindness.'[19] These statements are not merely expressions of generosity, as a virtue connected with the new faith; they also indicate that Hamza has no intention to topple Anusherwan and to ascend the throne himself. On the contrary, apart from a brief episode when the son of Hamza and Mehr-Nigar is put on the throne, Hamza insists that Anusherwan remain emperor, and he even retrieves him when he has retired to a fire temple. Hamza wants Anusherwan to convert to the true faith, in his capacity of emperor: 'If you swear to renounce fire worship and hold God as unique and alone, and consider the faith of Ibrahim the True Faith, I will kill these attendants and destroy the fire temple. I will settle you on the throne and make all of them show obedience to you.'[20] Only

18 Lakhnavi and Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, 303.

19 Ibid., 753.

20 Ibid., 822.

in this way can the two components of power be joined and can a new form of authority be created; only in this way can the split character of Anusherwan and, consequently, the empire, be healed; only in this way can the old tradition of kingship be impregnated with Islam and be rejuvenated as the stable foundation of a new phase in history.

As in *Tirant* and the texts discussed in the previous chapters, in the *Hamzanama*, too, we encounter once again the composite nature of authority, which comprises the prince, the vizier, the warrior, and, to a lesser degree, women. Before power can be effectively transformed into authority all these components need somehow to be balanced. The king personifies the tradition, the sacredness of kingship, the moral quality of kingship, and the anchoring of law. He represents, one might say, the essence of power. But this essence, as an ahistorical element, is not always able to deal with specific circumstances, or historical change. He is in need of viziers and heroes not only to effectuate his power, but also to enframe his power and tailor it to deal with a specific situation. Ideally, all these components are in harmony; if some disharmony occurs, for whatever reason, a new equilibrium must be sought. And, of course, a narrative must be constructed that both thoroughly examines the deficiencies and merits of the old order and justifies the establishment of a new order. In this way it not only shows how tensions are resolved; it actually contributes to an acquiescent view of reality.

The Emperor and the Barbarians: The Exploits of Yue Fei

In the Chinese imperial tradition, the position of the emperor is anchored in the cosmic configuration determined by the balance between the forces of Yin and Yang. On earth there are mainly two factors in which this balance becomes visible: the moral stature of the emperor; and the loyalty and integrity of the ministers. As indicated above, when Yang is dominant harmony rules, the empire is united and prospers, the government is effective, and the enemies keep a distance; when Yin is dominant, however, the economy collapses, strife and corruption paralyse the government, the empire falls apart, and—the ultimate disaster—the barbarians invade. History is the alternation of these (un)balances, in which harmony and dissent, prosperity and poverty, unity and fragmentation, virtue and corruption, and ultimately order and chaos seek predominance. In this conceptualization of history, 'evil' is often projected on the northern barbarians, the Mongol and Manchu nomads and their respective empires. On several occasions the tribes from the north invaded the empire and succeeded in conquering the throne and founding their own 'foreign' dynasties in China.

Among the great wars against the barbarians in Chinese history was the invasion of the Jin Tartars from modern Manchuria, which ended the reign of the Northern Song dynasty in 1126. This struggle is the subject of the short novel *Proclaiming harmony* discussed above, and of a novel which will be analysed presently and which centres around the famous Song general Yue Fei (1103–1141), who gained his reputation in the protracted war against the Jin between 1069–1126. The novel was written by Qian Cai, who lived during the reign of Qing Emperors Kangxi and Yongzheng between 1662 and 1735. He is part of the great revival of Chinese literature during the Ming and Qing periods, which is marked by a recompilation of narrative material, from both popular and historiographic sources, a spirit of enlightenment, and a combination of realist and supernatural frameworks. Qian Cai's book is different in the sense that it is a heroic romance rather than a novel of the type of the *Dream of the red chamber*, or *The sorcerer's revolt*, or *Creation of the gods*. It should be noted that the adventures of Yue Fei have become part of an extensive corpus of romantic/heroic popular literature, which moved far away from its historic framework. Qian Cai's vision is rather frugal in this respect, in spite of its hagiographical tone, and is relatively free of supernatural and fantastic excursions. It can be seen as the austere core of a more romanticized repertoire of heroic lore.

The outline of the story of the fall of the Northern Song has already been sketched above. The novel *General Yue Fei* begins with a reference to the Tang dynasty (618–907), which fell apart after a period of unrest, to be succeeded by the Great Song dynasty, which ruled for 300 years from its capital Bian Lang. The illustrious Emperor Huizong, as he is named here, became, as he aged, more and more immersed in Taoism, preferring spiritual contemplation over the affairs of the state. At that time a holy man arrives at the gate of a village where a son has just been born. He foretells a glorious future for the boy, but warns the parents that if a great shock occurs, mother and child should climb into a specific vessel. Not long afterwards, the child starts to scream. He and his mother are put in the vessel, and immediately a thunderstorm breaks out flooding and destroying the whole village. The vessel with the child and his mother is carried away by the teeming water until it is found by a squire who has had a dream that he would meet a nobleman that day. He adopts the mother and child into his own family.

The young Yue Fei turns out to be an intelligent, assiduous, and obedient child, who excels in writing essays. The scholar Zhou Tong notices his extraordinary talents and adopts him as a son, teaching him the arts of war. One day master and pupil go to the Hill of Dripping Water, where Yue Fei kills a snake in a cascade. A mist appears, and the snake flies in his direction, but when he

seizes it, it turns into a spear: the Supernatural Spear of Dripping Water. Apparently, the cascade was miraculous and divine. Zhou Tong teaches Yue Fei how to handle the bow and has military attire made for him. Yue Fei is engaged to the daughter of a magistrate and now receives the title 'lord'. He is presented with an indomitable horse, which can only be tamed by him, as if it had been destined for him. Zhou Tong dies and is buried on the Hill of Dripping Water, in accordance with his wish, while hymns were sung by Buddhist and Taoist priests.

Gradually, Yue Fei is sufficiently prepared to undergo the military examination. He has formed a band of loyal young warriors from the squires of his town, among whom is Nin Gao, a rather coarse and impulsive outlaw. The group goes to the Eastern Capital for the examination, where Yue Fei is a candidate for the most prominent position. However, to his dismay a corrupt prince participates who has bribed four of the five examiners. In the meantime Yue Fei acquires a sword made long ago, waiting to be collected by its predestined owner, that is able to fly up and kill men by itself. There is a mysterious story connected with the sword, involving a child's head, which was boiled to produce the pill of longevity, and a priest who beheads himself. It appears that Yue Fei is the warrior chosen by destiny to carry the sword. During the examination, in which Yue Fei shows his phenomenal skills, a quarrel breaks out between him and the evil prince. They agree to fight each other and draw up a document stating that if one of them is killed during their duel, the other is not answerable for his death. Of course, Yue Fei kills the prince, and he and his group flee the examination ground.

The incident is reported to the emperor. Examiner Zhong, the one who was not bribed by the prince and who protects Yue Fei, is discharged, but he pledges to Yue Fei that he will support him whenever possible. This opportunity arrives when Zhong is called back to the capital to take charge of a campaign against rebellious brigands. He introduces Yue Fei to the emperor, but because he has slain the prince and because of the intrigues of malignant officials, Yue Fei is awarded only a minor rank. Like many other good officials, Yue Fei, offended, withdraws to his hometown, and his comrades desert him to become brigands and robbers. The emperor, increasingly absorbed in his religious musings, abdicates and puts his son Qing Zhong on the throne.

Meanwhile, the threats on the northern border are building up. In the capital city of the Yellow Dragon, the chiefs of the Great Jin, a Jurchen dynasty, are scheming to invade China. A military advisor argues:

> Old southern barbarian emperor has conceded his throne to the young emperor called Qing Zhong. Since he has ascended the throne, this young

> emperor has never concerned himself with the government of his nation, but instead leaves it to corrupt officials to manage affairs, and demotes or banishes those who are loyal and good. Not only this, there are no good people to guard the border passes.[21]

The chances for a successful expedition seem auspicious. The ninth prince of Jin, Wushu, is nominated Commander-in-Chief to Exterminate China, because he is the only one who can lift an iron dragon. Through a combination of violence and persuasion, and in spite of the fierce resistance of provincial governors, Wushu gradually advances on the Song capital. The emperor fears for his life, the army commanders are incompetent, and the talented officials have resigned. Prime Minister Zhang, a creepy intriguer, proposes to conclude a peace treaty. He sends gold, silver, brocade, pretty girls, singing boys, pigs, sheep, cows, and wine to Wushu, who, however, demands in addition the two emperors and the crown prince as hostages, and the ancestral tablets of the previous five emperors. The royal family is subsequently led away to the north in humiliating and distressing circumstances, which are related in detail in the novel *Proclaiming harmony* discussed above.

In his captivity, the emperor writes an edict with his blood to the crown prince ordering him to escape and found the empire anew, so as to continue the ancestral worshipping of the previous emperors. The crown prince, Prince Kang, succeeds in escaping, helped by a magical bird, a Taoist priest, and a miraculous earthenware horse. He establishes himself in Nanjing as the Emperor Gao Zhong and attempts to regroup the Song ministers and troops. Zhang now counterfeits an edict of the emperor to call Yue Fei to the new capital, where he is accused of conspiring against the emperor's life. He is imprisoned, but his former friends hear of his ordeal and jointly advance on the capital to liberate their leader. Zhang's conspiracy is discovered, and Yue Fei is appointed Vice-Commander-in-Chief of the imperial army and later Commander-in-Chief, with the task of repelling the Jin army. Yue Fei's career is now in full bloom:

> He wore a silver helmet and a suit of armour made of silver leaves, beneath which was a robe of white silk. He was astride the White Dragon Horse, and in his hand was the Spear of Dripping Water. His face was white and long, with thin whiskers and beard; his shoulders broad and waist thick, and his martial dignity was indeed awesome. [...] His manner was stern and majestic, and his murderous air was steaming.[22]

---

21 Qian Cai, *General Yue Fei*, trans. T.L. Yang (Hong Kong, 1995) 170.

22 Ibid., 300.

In spite of Yue Fei's efforts, the Jin march towards Nanjing, and the emperor, who has been feasting and drinking with his concubine Lotus Fragrance, has to flee ignominiously. With the help of a magical ship they reach Oxhead Hill, where they fortify themselves against the enemy. At first Yue Fei despairs and wants to cut off his own head: 'Even in ancient times it was said that if the king was humiliated then the official should die. Now I do not know where the Sacred One is taking refuge. As a subject official, what do I have to live for?'[23] But soon he recomposes himself and organizes the defences and a proto-palace: 'Pray erect a platform on the left of the Hall of Divine Officials to emulate the manner in which Emperor Gao Zu of the Han Dynasty appointed the generals. You should ceremoniously make the appointments of the Commander-in-Chief and all the military officers so that they will be willing to sacrifice themselves for the country.'[24] Yue Fei prepares for battle: 'Tomorrow the Sacred One may mount the platform to watch the battle between me and Wushu. General Wang will please report over merits, and the Grand Counsellor will please record them in the Credits Register.'[25]

The battles end in a stalemate, and Wushu proposes a peace agreement. The emperor concedes and re-ascends the Great Precious Throne. Yue Fei retires to his village, embittered by the weakness of the emperor. The empress embroiders a pair of banners for him, showing a phoenix and a dragon, and the words 'serving the Nation with the utmost loyalty'.[26] Yue Fei returns to the court, but he is accused of rebellion and in the end is strangled to death, together with his son, in spite of his lament: 'Throughout my life I have but one ambition, and this is to restore China and to wipe away national humiliation.'[27] His death does not pass by unnoticed: 'When [they] returned to Heaven, suddenly a fierce wind rose up wildly and all the fires and lights were extinguished. Black mists filled the sky and sand and pebbles were blown about.'[28] Moreover, our hero has his revenge posthumously, as his spirit enters someone else's body, who appears before the emperor calling himself Yue Fei. The emperor, struck by fear, falls from the Dragon Throne and dies. The next emperor restores Yue Fei's honour, and his family returns to its former illustrious status.

In this summary of *Yue Fei* we find some familiar elements that we have seen in the other romances, but there are important differences as well. Whereas

23 Ibid., 436.
24 Ibid., 439.
25 Ibid., 457.
26 Ibid., 540.
27 Ibid., 703.
28 Ibid., 721.

Tirant and *Hamzanama* are clearly chivalric romances, in spite of novelistic elements in the former work, the book of *Yue Fei* can be more accurately typified as a historical novel. Not only are the main characters all historical figures; the realistic, historical, framework also infuses the spatio-temporal structure of the narrative. The story takes place within a geographical and historical reality, which is amplified by the many references to formalities and procedures such as the description of the military examination, the reports sent by officials, registrations, legal documents, etc. It will be recalled that in *Tirant*, too, the exploits of the hero are embedded in procedures and agreements, but in *Yue Fei*, as in other Chinese novels, the strict adherence to formal rules and regulations is even more pronounced. When the wife of Prime Minister Zhang helps the emperor escape from the vicious schemes of her husband, she convincingly argues: 'This concerns the great issue of loyalty of an official to the Emperor. Will this not entirely destroy human relationships?'[29] After she has helped the emperor flee, she commits suicide, as the prescriptions demand. On Oxhead Hill the ceremonial structure is provisionally reinstated.

The realism of the story is also reflected in the sparing use of supernatural elements. Of course, Yue Fei is blessed by a miraculous rescue as an infant, and with a miraculous horse, spear, and sword, but these attributes only enhance his symbolic status, as a warrior predestined within history and within the cosmic balance of forces. They are at no point used to defeat enemies in magical ways or miraculously decide a battle, and seem to be paraphernalia rather than weapons. In contrast, other 'miraculous' weapons are more elaborately described and used, such as gunpowder and cannon, and the ingenious battleships of the brigands on the lake. Supernatural phenomena are more generally apportioned to the Song Dynasty, and more specifically to Prince Kang, whose escape from captivity is clearly due to the efforts of the immortals. Religion is hardly an issue, in spite of the appearance of the odd Buddhist or Taoist priest, or references to ancestral worship. All this contrasts sharply with, for instance, novels such as *Creation of the gods*, or *The war of the three kingdoms*.

Although these novelistic elements distinguish *Yue Fei* from the genuine epic, it cannot be said that Yue Fei as a character has novelistic traits. Perhaps to emphasize his heroic role, as a knight of the old tradition, Yue Fei escapes from his emblematic role, which highlights his unwavering loyalty to the Song Dynasty. Even when his talents are spurned, he refuses to give up his loyalty: 'I was born a subject of the Song Dynasty, so I should die a ghost of the Song

29 Ibid., 432.

FIGURE 6 *Diderot and Catherine II, by Alphonse Marie de Neuville, 19th century.*

Dynasty.'[30] To emphasize this devotion, he has a tattoo applied to his back: 'Serving the Nation in the utmost loyalty'.[31] He is prepared to kill himself and his son as a punishment for negligence in serving the throne, and is only prevented from doing so by others, and when he is accused of rebellion he only repeats his testimony of utmost loyalty. This loyalty carries over to the bond between the members of his warband, who are loyal until the end to their chief, not only rescuing him when needed, but also sacrificing all their strength and courage to the good cause. Like Tirant and Hamza, he is therefore a kind of saviour, a charismatic hero destined to influence the course of history, but unlike them, he is unable to mould history to his will, and in the end 'real' history curbs his ambitions.

Yue Fei's loyalty and charisma are primarily directed at the dynasty, represented, first, by the old emperor and subsequently by his son and Crown Prince Kang. It is the position of the emperor and the continuity of the dynasty that have to be defended, rather than the emperors as persons. This does not mean, however, that there are no other identity markers and conceptualized relationships. Throughout the work the notion of China, as an ethnic, historical, and political entity, is evoked, for instance by a governor who meditates, after an offer by Wushu: 'I am Chinese. My ancestors and all those related to me by marriage are in China, so how can I accept fortune and prestige from you?'[32] Interestingly, Wushu is portrayed as a sinophile who is 'addicted' to Chinese literature and history; who loves the Chinese people and often wears Chinese clothes.[33] When the long period of war ends in a stalemate, and Wushu offers peace, he apologizes for his conduct and pledges: 'China and Jin were originally one family. Your emperor and the lord of the Jin are brothers. […] Today I shall swear an oath to Heaven: from now on we shall live in harmony and we shall never invade China.'[34] This is not the opinion of Yue Fei, who continues to consider the Jin as foreign invaders and barbarians, especially since they refuse to release the two emperors. In the novel, the Jin are finally defeated after seven years, and the bodies of the Song emperors and empress are brought back to their family.

This brings us to the issue of kingship. In *Yue Fei* we perceive a pattern similar to that in *Tirant* and *Hamzanama*. The emperor holds the legitimacy derived from the stability of the dynasty, the balance of celestial forces, and

30 Ibid., 246.
31 Ibid., 248.
32 Ibid., 306.
33 Ibid., 171.
34 Ibid., 515.

the integrity of his person. As soon as this delicate configuration begins to shift, weakness creeps in and foreign enemies take the opportunity to execute their wicked plans. As a counterpoise to the weakening of legitimate power, a hero emerges instilled with the forces hidden in history, allowing him to gather a *de facto* power based on his virtues, courage, strength, and loyalty. Thus, a crisis in the system provokes alternative powers, both good and evil, to fill up the vacuum of authority. The 'good' powers are aimed at neutralizing the 'evil' powers, but they are not automatically acknowledged by the legitimate ruler, since they seem to be a challenge to him too. The dilemma is, again, how to mould the two components of power into a single apparatus, both practically, reconciling *de facto* power with legitimacy, and ideologically, redefining concepts of loyalty and order. Only then can a new balance be achieved that can warrant the successful exertion of authority, the exertion of power not through force but through authority. In *Yue Fei* this is realized only after the death of the hero, who, anyhow, because of his unyielding loyalty, would never have accommodated to a process of historical change.

Hang Tuah, the Malay Hero

The story of Yue Fei shows how the values of kingship, and society as a whole, as part of a discursive, ideological system, can be preserved and conveyed by using historical references and reconstructing it within a fictional framework. This procedure can be used to legitimate kingship or to analyse the origins and conjure the effects of crises. History is encapsulated in a new framework, in which it can be assimilated with and be preserved in the common perception of history and society, as a repository of essential concepts that can be related to changing circumstances. These observations are especially relevant for foundation myths, which operate in the interface between history and legend, and are both a legitimation for a community and an epitome of its main values and self-images. Whereas the romances we have discussed until now are related mainly to crises, of the Byzantine, Persian, and Chinese imperial thrones, we will now turn our attention to a narrative that belongs more properly to the category of foundation myths, although it, too, is in the end related to crisis. Therefore, perhaps it should be read not only as a foundation myth, but also as a text investigating the crises that in the end threatens the very survival of the community. It is also possible to read the text as an unfinished story, as a chronicle that has been violently interrupted.

The romance in question is the Malayan popular epic *The history of Hang Tuah*, which belongs to the interesting corpus of romances (*hekaya* or *sira*)

that appeared in Malay from the fifteenth century onwards, and that presents a combination of history and legend. This particular work certainly postdates 1641, because at that date Malacca was conquered by the Dutch East India Company, the episode that concludes the work. The manuscript on which the German translation used here is based is datable to 1718, but the text certainly contains older material, perhaps going back to the fifteenth century. The events at the beginning, after the mythical introduction, refer to the reign of Sultan Mansur Shah (1374–1447) and the reign of Sultan Alauddin (1447–1474). The work is related to the chronicle *Sejara Melaya* ('Malay chronicle') and other narrative sources. As we will see, the text also clearly reflects the influence of the Muslim cultural realm, both in the material itself and in titles, terminology, etc., indicating an intensive interaction with the wider Muslim world in that period, after the gradual Islamization of South East Asia from the fourteenth century onwards.

In spite of the structural link with the Muslim domain of religion and literature, it is clear from the beginning that a form of syncretism is allowed to survive in the text, suggesting that probably material from an earlier period has been incorporated into it, or, perhaps more accurately, that the Islamic parts were grafted onto earlier material. The story begins with the semi-divine origin of the later kings of Malacca. In the divine empire, Sang, a powerful ruler, has many vassals and ministers. He is venerated by all. On earth, there rules a mighty king with a miraculously beautiful daughter. Soothsayers advise the king to build a splendid palace for her on the island Biram Dewa, where she will meet her future husband. One day Sang goes hunting on Biram Dewa, finds the palace, and marries the beautiful princess. They have a son and return to the divine empire, but when the son, named Sang Peri Dewa, grows up he has to return to the earth to rule, in a palace on the holy mountain of Malaya, near Palembang. When Sang Peri Dewa goes bathing, he sees a well-built ox on the shore. It vomits a beautiful girl. Sang Peri Dewa marries her, and she bears him four sons, who will all be kings.

This introduction defines the semi-divine status of the Malaccan kings: They are humans, but they are the offspring of Dewas and Indras, of spirits and gods. When the king of the people of Bentan dies, they ask Sang to send his eldest son to rule them. A court is set up with four nobles, who act as grand vizier (Bendahara Paduka Raja), prime minister (Perdana Mentri), minister of justice and commander-in-chief (Temenggong Seri Diraja), and court menial (Tun Pikrama). After a dream in which the moon falls from the sky and creates a halo around the head of his son, the father of Hang Tuah moves to Bentan to open a shop. From his early youth, Hang Tuah is courageous and bold, and one day he and his friends go out at sea and defeat a band of pirates. They become pupils

of the wise Adri Putra, who teaches them wisdom, martial arts, physiognomy, and the art of gestures. On their return they defeat an amok-runner and as a reward are accepted as pages of the king. Because of his intelligence, the king heeds the Hang Tuah's advice.

At a place on the shore where a small deer is seen chased by a band of dogs, a new capital named Malacca is built. The new kingdom gradually develops relations with other settlements in the archipelago, and the brothers of the king become kings of the Kling Empire, Java, and Menang Kabau. Hang Tuah teaches the young princes how to behave as kings, how to give audience to their ministers and officials, and the terms and conventions for giving commands. In the meantime, Hang Tuah distinguishes himself in several confrontations with other princes and becomes a powerful hero with the title Laksamana ('admiral'). Jealous rivals now accuse him of flirting with the palace girls. The grand vizier advises him to leave, and Hang Tuah decides to go and abduct the gorgeous daughter of the grand vizier of Indrapura, to present her to the king in marriage. When he has succeeded in bringing her to Malacca—using a potion that made her enamoured of him—he regains the king's trust: 'The words of the Laksamana were equal to the words of the king, because the ruler gave him his fullest confidence.'[35]

A scheming rival once again accuses Hang Tuah of improper bevaviour, and the king orders Hang Tuah's execution. The grand vizier alerts him, however, and allows him to escape:

> When a ruler orders me to execute you, although you are innocent, and obey his command, I will have a bad reputation among the populace, and they will say: 'Look at the grand vizier; he has executed the Laksamana without an investigation, although he was innocent.' And before God the Almighty my guilt will be great, because you are a mighty warrior and an official of the land.[36]

A pious sheykh predicts that his exile will last only twenty days. After the pretender has created havoc in the palace and usurped the throne, Hang Tuah returns and defeats him, restoring the king to his throne. The subsequent episodes recount Hang Tuah's adventures at sea, his visits to the Kling capital, which is a prosperous commercial centre, his journey to China, where he sees

35 *Die Geschichte von Hang Tuah. Eine Erzählung aus dem 16. Jahrhundert über den malaiischen Volkshelden*, trans. Hans Overbeck (Leipzig and Weimar, 1986) 270.

36 Ibid., 270.

temples and strange statues, and his journey to Siam, where he buys elephants, and finally, to Ceylon. These journeys, of course, mark Malacca's position as a flourishing centre of the South East Asian trade networks, which cover the eastern regions. On his travels he also meets the Prophet Khidlir (al-Khadir or al-Khidr), who gives him magical fruits.

The final—long—episode describes Hang Tuah's expedition to the west, that is, the Arabian Peninsula, Egypt, and Istanbul, to buy firearms and large cannon. He travels via Aceh to Mocha and Jedda, and it is explained to him that from here the Hajj-pilgrims go on to Mecca, to visit the tomb of Eve. Hang Tuah, too, wants to visit Eve's grave to obtain blessings that may be profitable in the Hereafter. He is advised to wait for the pilgrimage month and become a Hajji. While they are waiting for the pilgrimage month, they do some sightseeing and visit the tomb of Eve and other graves, and admire the treasures of Masir (Egypt) and Scham (Syria). They also meet Khidlir once again. Then they perform the ceremonies and obligations of the Hajj, to become 'Hajjis'. They subsequently visit Egypt, before gradually advancing to what is called Byzantium or Istanbul. The name 'Ottoman' is not mentioned, but it is clear that the city is considered as one of the main political centres of the world and part of a friendly empire. The city is described as enormous, with a million streets, a surface so big that after four months they have seen only one quarter of it, and with thousands of elephants. Hang Tuah receives a cap and a turban cloth from the sultan personally, as a present for the Malaccan king, and shiploads of weapons.[37]

When Hang Tuah returns home, he has himself buried to experience what it is like to be dead. He retires for some time to meditate on God with a sheykh from Hadramawt who came from Mecca via Aceh.

The journey to Istanbul is no mere pleasure trip, but is required by the changing circumstances in South East Asia. Already on his first journey to the Kling Empire, Hang Tuah had encountered galleys of the Franks, who shot at his boats with seven cannon. In the end the Franks surrendered, and this victory ushered in the period of Malaccan trade. The confrontations with the Franks continue and increase, however, for instance when the Malaccan ships moor at a place also used by the Franks to unload their ships. The Franks and the Malay are 'enemies from ancient times'.[38] In 1571 the Spanish/Franks

37 The account of the journey to Mecca and Istanbul is derived from a description of a historical delegation from Aceh, combined with descriptive passages from Malay romances. Vladimir Braginsky, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme in Traditional Malay Literature. Imagining the Other to Empower the Self* (Leiden and Boston, 2015).

38 *Die Geschichte von Hang Tuah*, 435.

conquer Manila, which is the direct occasion for the delegation to Istanbul, to the prince of Byzantium, who is 'God's substitute on earth'.[39] Nevertheless, after the expedition to Istanbul, the Franks/Portuguese come with a ship filled with merchandise from Manila and request permission to build a factory next to the main gate of Malacca. This permission is refused, but the following year they are allowed to buy a small piece of land. They build a huge fort, however, from which they shell the town. Some years later the fort is conquered by the Dutch, with the help of the neighbouring Johor people, and they are 'in Malacca until the present day'.[40]

Like the previous narratives, *Hang Tuah* is not about the king, but about the hero who is the mainstay of the royal throne and the effective instrument of power. The king represents legitimacy and royal descent, and incorporates a bond between the Malay people and the divine. Thus, the historical unfolding of the Malay empires is rooted in religion and myth, making its existence not only legitimate, but even unavoidable. As Laksamana, Hang Tuah acquires so much power that, as in the other cases, it is feared that he will usurp the throne, but he remains loyal to his king. He represents all the aspects of the kingdom that the king does not possess: He is courageous, he undertakes sea journeys, he defeats enemies, he is practical and ingenious, he speaks twelve languages (including Arabic and Chinese), and he is an organizer of trade. The ministers, although they are mentioned explicitly, especially the grand vizier, are depicted as fearful and weak, suitable for ceremony only and scheming, but useless in times of danger. However, even Hang Tuah cannot prevent the Franks, in their different guises, from imposing their military hegemony on Malacca and thereby penetrating the Malay trade network.

The symbiosis of the Malay king and Hang Tuah is associated with a clearly delimited political-ethnic community: the Malay people. The Malay realm is first of all defined by the four kings of divine descent, who divide power over regionally spread centres, but who unmistakably share the same cultural and ethnic identity. Surely, there is some miscegenation with other Southeast Asian peoples, especially the Javanese. During a visit to Indrapura it is remarked: 'The melodies of Indrapura are not Malay, for although we are mixed with the Malayans, we are not pure Malayans, like the people of Malacca,'[41] And: 'The people of Malacca are Malayans who have mixed with the Javanese of Menjabalut.'[42] Clearly, the regional peoples are ethnically close to each other

39 Ibid., 522.
40 Ibid., 583.
41 Ibid., 211–212.
42 Ibid.

and mixed. They are not always friendly, however, and it is remarkable how often ceremonial visits to other courts end in rows and fighting, the host challenging the courage of the visitors and the ministers scheming to test the vigilance of Hang Tuah. There are relationships and familiarity, but they are certainly not without incidents, envy, and animosity.

As remarked above, the definition of the community is related to religious mythology affirming the divine origin of royal authority. Still, this religious component of identity is not without ambiguity. Hang Tuah's process of initiation reveals how various religious elements are combined to shape his spiritual state. He is first initiated into knowledge and wisdom by Adi Putra, a Hindu sage. His development into a hero is marked by symbols and objects of several kinds, ranging from prognostics, a magical crease which protects him, the ability to transform himself, a magic potion, a girdle with Qur'anic verses, a magic cudgel, several meetings with Khidlir, the Muslim al-Khadir, a formula disabling the Frankish cannon, the hajj, and finally the teachings of an Arabian Muslim sheykh and spiritual retreat. Therefore, the text contains elements from various sources, which were gathered over time, from religion, popular beliefs, popular lore, and Arab Islam. Hang Tuah seemingly develops from a Hindu disciple into a Muslim, with the hajj as the great turning point. However, the journey to Istanbul to ask for military support—which is historical—indicates that Malacca before that time identified itself as belonging to the Islamic world, with the Ottoman sultan as the symbol of political and religious unity. It is remarkable that China and India, both strong regional powers, play little role in this respect.

To conclude, Hang Tuah shows many other, by now familiar, characteristics of the romance of chivalry that we have discussed above, with some significant differences. It is a hybrid text, in the sense that it combines history with fiction and seems to be composed from various elements from diverse sources. It contains the markers defining the identity of the community, both internally (semi-divine kingship), and externally (the splendour of Mecca and Istanbul, the centres of the Muslim faith). Authority is based on the complementary balance between symbolic and effective power, represented by the king and the hero, whereby the hero, more than the king, personifies the values of the community. It is the hero, too, with whom the audience will identify, as the protagonist of a history that has been narrativized to be incorporated into the collective imagination.

The 'Foreign' Sultan: Al-Zahir Baybars

In *Hang Tuah* we can see how an epic story can serve to record the founding myth of a community, a city, and an empire. This kind of narrative tends to emphasize criteria such as authenticity, virtue, and piety, in addition to courage and enterprise. It is much more complicated when kingship—or a dynasty—is not rooted in the origin of the community, or even in its history, such as the Manchu and Mongol emperors in China and Iran. In these cases it is not the identification of the ruler with the community that should be stressed, but rather the ruler's capacities, such as virtuousness, justice, and courage. It can, of course, be questioned whether an identification of the ruler with a community is a necessity for good governance, since notions of social or political coherence need not be expressed in ethnic or linguistic criteria. Power structures can be built within a society without necessarily being rooted in history, which for many people may be only a faint concept. A case in point is the Ottoman Empire, whose dominance of the Arab regions was perhaps always perceived as 'foreign' but which was contested politically only with the rise of the notion of nationalism and an Arabic cultural identity.

In this section we will briefly discuss a work that reflects these issues of identification, power formation, and literary discourse: the *Sirat Baybars*, or the 'Romance of Baybars'. The text is a romanticized account of the career of the famous Sultan al-Zahir Baybars al-Bunduqdari (1223?–77; r. 1260–1277), the first Mamluk sultan of Egypt and Syria and the founder of Mamluk rule (1260–1517). After the Kurdish Ayyubid warlords had pushed back the crusader kingdoms in Syria, they founded the Ayyubid dynasty in Egypt and Syria (1171–1260), forming a new Sunni stronghold against the incursions of the Franks. After their line died out, the sultanate was taken over by one of the leaders of the corps of slave troops, or *mamluks*, named Baybars, whose rule was acknowledged by the majority of the other commanders after a fierce power struggle. Since the Mamluks were slaves, their rule did not constitute a dynasty; succession was based on the acquisition of power within the various factions of the Mamluk *amirs*. Since the slave troops were Turks mainly from the Asian steppes and the Caucasus, they could not identify with Egyptian or Syrian history in any meaningful way, and the legitimation of their power consisted rather in their ability to establish internal order and to defeat the Crusaders and, later, the Mongol invaders. Apart from this, their power was entwined with an elite of spice merchants who profited from the increasingly lucrative trade with Southeast Asia.

The way in which Baybars secured his position as sultan was therefore based not on claims of historical or traditional legitimacy, but rather on his personal

character and talents. It is perhaps for this reason that he became a figure who appealed to the popular imagination and who remained attractive for later generations, too. It is not improbable that popular stories about Baybars started to circulate not long after his death, and perhaps some accounts of his personal exploits may have been spread and cultivated during his lifetime, as part of a narrative base for legitimacy. It has also been argued that the material for the romance conforms more to the exploits of the later Sultan Barsbay. Whatever may have been the case, the 'Romance of Baybars' as it has been preserved seems to be a huge reservoir of popular stories connected with Baybars, the Crusaders, the Isma'ilis in the Syrian mountains, the Mongols, and the intrigues among the Mamluk emirs. It is not a straightforward biography, even as a romanticized narrative, but rather a confluence of narrative material around the person of the illustrious sultan. In this sense, it is related to many other Arabic *siras*/romances, but it is different, too. Whereas the heroes of most romances are legendary or semi-historical figures, Baybars lived in the full light of history; and, whereas most heroes, as we have seen, tend to support a legitimate king and embody the discourse of kingship as separated from the legitimacy of the king himself, Baybars is both the hero and the king. Here, there seems to be no separation between the components of royal authority.

Let us now turn to the romance itself. The story begins with a dream of the Ayyubid King al-Salih Ayyub, who has seen himself on a hill with his army and his noblemen, while from the east a fire is approaching and from the west two crows come flying. From the east a band of lions approaches, led by a huge animal with a bull's head, which extinguishes the fire. A flight of birds chase away the crows. The king turns to his soothsayers to ask for an explanation. They tell him that the country will be attacked by Fire-worshippers, who will be defeated by a *mamluk* who will inherit the throne. The crows are the Franks who will be repelled by the people from the mountains, whose leader will acquire fame in all corners of the world. After hearing this explanation, King al-Salih Ayyub, who has assumed the titles of Descendant of Muhammad, Sultan of Syria and Egypt, Khaqan of the Two Seas, Servant of the Holy Places and the Aqsa Mosque, decides to purchase a new contingent of slaves to become viziers, amirs, equerries, and other functionaries. A merchant is sent to Damascus, where a new group of *mamluks* has arrived from Bursa, led by two commanders, Qalawun and Edamor. The *mamluks* are bought, but before their departure to Cairo they find a strange boy called Mahmud in a bathhouse. A fight ensues, in which Qalawun spits in the boy's face, while Edamor protects him. The boy is bought with a special purse of forty pieces of silver, which Ayyub had received when he ascended the throne.

When the new *mamluks* leave Damascus, Mahmud stays behind. He is bullied by the governor of Damascus, but he shows his special destiny when he is mysteriously spared by a fierce lion and receives the prophecy that he will be king of Syria and Egypt and the 'Islamic land'.[43] He spends some time in the Nur al-Din Hospital, where he becomes more self-conscious and performs good deeds for the poor. Because he looks like her deceased son Baybars, he is adopted by a prominent lady and assumes the name Baybars. The narrator now reflects on Mahmud's past: He is the descendant of a dervish and the queen of Balkh. As a boy he was intelligent and versed in the Qur'an, arousing the jealousy of his uncles. Mahmud disappeared and turned up, alone, in Damascus, bitterly disposed against his uncles. Comforted by the prophecy of his future splendour, Baybars buys a large mace that, a Persian merchant explains to him, came from Samarkand and, according to a book, would emerge in Damascus and be bought by someone who will be king of Syria, Egypt, and the lands of Islam. Baybars buys the mace and departs for Cairo, where he is welcomed by his master al-Salih Ayyub.

After some intrigues in Cairo, often instigated by the qadi, who is jealous of him, Baybars meets Uthman, a brutal, notorious rogue, who scares even the police and the governors. Baybars feels affection for him—he is a young and handsome lad, long, straight, and supple as a willow branch, with black eyes, and beardless, in brief, very attractive—and decides to adopt him as his friend. He beats and disciplines him until he is obedient and teaches him to follow God's rules. Uthman finally swears loyalty to God and Baybars, invoking The Lady, Umm Qasim, the Protrectress of Cairo, La Hasiba, or Sayyida Zaynab, the patron saint of Cairo. Baybars teaches him the doctrines and rituals of the faith, and Uthman demands that Baybars will have no secrets from him, will always tell him where he goes, will eat the same food as he, and will give him as many gold pieces as he wants. They now become brothers in the sight of God. Uthman is pardoned for his past mischief out of respect for amir Baybars.

Baybars steadily advances in the hierarchy of the Mamluk elite, enjoying the special favours of the king. He is appointed *amir al-hajj*, commander of the pilgrimage caravan, and flag bearer, and receives the tax farm of the sugar factory in Bulaq and the governorship of Mahalla. His destiny to become king is affirmed when the vizier shows him an alcove in which portraits are displayed of the kings of the Ayyubids, beginning with Sunqur the Atabek of Aleppo and ending with Baybars himself sitting on the Egyptian throne. This confirma-

43 *Roman de Baïbars*, trans. Georges Bohas and Jean-Patrick Guillaume, 10 vols. (Paris, 1985) vol. 1, 84.

tion of the prophecy gives him the confidence to confront the many intrigues against him plotted by his rivals. In the meantime he has several mysterious experiences. First, he has a meeting with al-Khadir, who teaches him the art of war and instructs him to always let justice prevail and to inspect the conditions of his subjects. He provides him with the strength of forty righteous people of God, that is, saints. He receives seven marks of royalty on his forehead.

Another strange adventure involves Baybars reading a book in his new palace when suddenly the candles move by themselves. He hears the voice of his forefather Sultan Ibrahim and is transported to another dimension, where he is met by a giant jinn. He is summoned to draw a spear from a ring, and when he succeeds in doing so, he is given the armature of a previous inhabitant of the palace, a famous king of Egypt and warrior for the faith. A third incident takes place when he supervises the building of a bridge in Mahalla, which is destroyed every night after a day's work. Baybars encounters three saintly hajjis, whom he had seen among forty saints in the Qasyun cave in Damascus, and who explain that Baybars has failed to ask permission from the proprietor of the land, who is Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi, the illustrious saint of Tanta, Liberator of Captives, the man with the Two Veils. Baybars is transported to a deserted plain, where he enters a mosque. A man appears with wings and a veiled face. The saint prophesies that the Franks will attack the Muslims seven times, and he gives Baybars a breastplate and a ring with which he can travel fast. Later Baybars has another meeting with Ahmad al-Badawi, and this time he is allowed to see his face and 'the strong light from his eyes'.[44]

In the following episodes Baybars is sent on an expedition in which he can show off his military skills, first to liberate Muslim captives, and later to confront an invasion by the Mongol/Persian Khan Halawun [Hülegü], who wants to take revenge for the defeat by Ayyub of his father Möngke Timour. During a duel between Baybars and Halawun the latter reveals that the Mamluk amirs are scheming against Baybars, and he offers him the throne of Persia. Baybars is now inclined to accept the offer, saying: 'I want to go to the Persians; I was born a Persian',[45] but Ayyub, who has hastily come to the front, forces him to remain loyal, using even magical means. Subsequently, Baybars captures the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople and conquers Jerusalem. Later, Baybars is abducted by the Christians and taken to Genoa, where Ayyub

44 Ibid., vol. 4, 217.

45 Ibid., vol. 5, 115.

retrieves him with a ship of Muslim troops. This is only the beginning of Baybars's dealings with the Franks and the Byzantine Emperor, which are mainly concerned with intrigues against his person, refractory Christians in Syria, and the ransoming of prisoners. The main actors are the treacherous monk Jawan, *babb* Michael of Constantinople, *rey* John of Genoa, and King Frederick of Rome.

When Ayyub becomes fatally ill, he leaves no doubt that he wants Baybars to succeed him. He has him wear his ceremonial dress and take his place in the royal cavalcade. He receives a document stating that nobody may accuse him of having poisoned the king. Official *bay'a*s—acceptances of his rule—are written by some of the amirs, the dervishes, and the sheykh of the al-Azhar Mosque. This arouses the jealousy of the rivalling amirs, especially Qalawun and Aybak, and when after Ayyub's death Baybars is declared king, the amirs protest and refuse to accept him. Thereupon Baybars declines the kingship, not because of the intrigues against him, but because he knows that there are still two princes of the Ayyubid line who precede him. Thus, two princes ascend the throne, but both are killed miserably. Baybars, who has in the meantime married Taj Bakht, the daughter of the Mongol Khan Berke, is again pronounced king, but he still refuses.

After the battle of Ayn Jalut, in which the Fire-worshippers are defeated, and after many intrigues, Baybars finally concedes, but he poses several conditions: First, that the *fidawis*, the warriors from the mountains who are his main support, be integrated into the regular army and paid from the state treasury; second, that all amirs become fully dedicated to the struggle against the Franks; third, that no intermarriages be allowed between the different *ojaq*s, or regiments (Kurds, Daylamites, Circassians, Turkomans), in order to prevent their conspiring against him; fourth, that no official can be discharged without a legally valid reason; fifth, that no assemblies of amirs occur without prior permission; sixth, that no new palaces be built without prior permission. After the amirs have ratified these conditions, Baybars is now formally and ceremonially enthroned as the next sultan of Egypt and Syria. Here the second phase of Baybars's adventures begins, consisting mainly of opposing the Christians and the Persians and countering domestic intrigues and conspiracies. Needless to say, the sultan not only overcomes all challenges to his authority; he also reveals himself to be a just and benevolent ruler.

If we look at the narrative strategies and generic characteristics of the 'Romance of Baybars', we find that it contains some elements of the 'adventure trope', but that it at the same time escapes its typical emblematic procedures. The story begins with an interruption, leaving Mahmoud/Baybars alone and forsaken in Damascus, and with a prophecy that he will at one point be

king. The story contains many familiar motifs, such as the miraculous weapons, dreams, mystical meetings, great exploits, heroic feats, etc., filling the main protagonist with symbolic and narrative potential. Still, the story also shows a remarkable measure of realism, which is partly due to the 'real' historical framework, but also to the enactment of the intrigues, the insertion of dialogues, and the diversity of characters. This realism is enhanced by the figure of Uthman, whose role is, of course, reminiscent of Sadan in 'Ajib and Gharib', Adi Madi-Karib and Amar in *Hamzanama* and Nin Gao in *Yue Fei*, all caricatures of uncouth, impulsive hotheads endowed with unyielding loyalty. But Uthman is not only this; his defective colloquial speech, his quick repartee, and his combination of stupidity and cunning render him into a link between the audience and the hero, the person with whom the audience can identify, especially since Baybars himself is not Egyptian. Uthman is a son of the common people, who draws 'real, everyday' life into the story as a frame of reference.

These characteristics give the romance to some extent the appearance of a biographical novel in which Baybars's career and development are described in well-measured steps. It has to be said, however, that many of the intrigues and plots are rather stereotypical and represent the farcical turns of more conventional romances. Especially the Christians, as arch-enemies, are caricatures, both as despicable, treacherous schemers and plotters, with their secret books and foul rituals, and as stupid and uncivilized boors who have no understanding of protocol, law, and decent warfare. They need to be humiliated and corrected, and if they submit, they will be left in peace. The romance contains a typical love story, between Maryam, the daughter of the king of Genoa, and Ma'ruf, the leader of the *fidawis*. Maryam, who after an auspicious dream and after being harassed by a monk is converted to Islam, is married to Ma'ruf, who penetrates her twenty times during their wedding night. The 'victory' is described in rather martial terms: 'The outstretched weapon approached the fortified tower, which began to tremble and asked for mercy; the small door opened itself, blood flowed on the thighs and hips, the cannon took position before the breach, and the citadel surrendered itself completely.'[46] This brief episode is not just a colourful addition; it epitomizes the essence of both Christian and Muslim chivalric romances symbolizing both the moral triumph of the true faith and military superiority.

As observed above, one of the most intriguing aspects of the romance is the fact that Baybars is not of Egyptian origin, but from Central Asia. The figure of Uthman is, among other things, designed to symbolize the synthesis between

46 Ibid., 60.

Baybars and Egypt and his integration into the Egyptian popular milieu. Still, his foreign descent is emphasized several times. When he arrives in Cairo he is unable to understand the Egyptian dialect; he is called a 'Turk' and 'Baybars of Khwarazm', emphasizing his foreignness. In his confrontation with Halawun he is even tempted to defect to the Persians, in spite of their being characterized as Fire-worshippers. He 'feels' Persian, and seems to have landed in Egypt not out of free will, but only as a result of the betrayal of his uncles. He feels homesick and longs for his mother, brother, and sister. And, finally, he marries a Mongol princess, forfeiting the chance to assimilate through marriage.[47] All these disruptive sentiments are meant to render him more recognizable as a human being, but, of course, they play no decisive role, since from the beginning he is fated to become king of Egypt and Syria. Even if he is a 'foreign' element, he has a predestined role to play in Muslim history.

Because a clear ethnic or linguistic framework for identification is lacking, the religious factor becomes the more significant. Especially during his disciplining of Uthman, Baybars's knowledge and adherence to the articles of the faith are displayed, which he already internalized as a young boy. The story also emphasizes the importance of the law, as a source of social and political order at various levels, protecting the common people, deciding conflicts, neutralizing intrigues, and structuring undertakings and transitions, such as the transfer of royal authority and dealings with the Franks. Nevertheless, in spite of this stress on orthodoxy, it is no coincidence that Baybars's grandfather was a dervish. Even in his youth, his person is linked to the esoteric dimension of life through his descent and the prophecy of his bright future. This link is confirmed by his meetings with such illustrious figures as al-Khadir and Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi, both important protectors of the faithful, who establish the relationship of the hero with the dimension of spirituality and esotericism and, thereby, with the popular domain of religiosity. The endorsement of al-Khadir turns Baybars into a 'real' Muslim; the support of al-Badawi gives him strong Egyptian credentials.

These religious aspects find expression in various peculiarities of Baybars's character and conduct. His piety is manifested not only in his loyalty to the faith, but also in his attitude in life, which is governed by a strong sense of justice. Even in his early youth, as a forsaken slave boy, Baybars is concerned with the conditions of the common people, protecting them against injustice and oppression. He intuitively acts as the protector of the weak and the poor, and as the natural enemy of hypocritical officials such as qadis and gover-

47 Ibid., vol. 2, 35, 59; vol. 5, 209.

nors, who outwardly exhibit piety and obedience to the faith's doctrines, but are actually striving only for their own personal profit and power. Baybars's religiosity is shown, too, by his faithfulness to the cause of the community of Muslims and his fierce stance against its enemies, defined in religious terms, the Christian Franks and the Persian Fire-worshippers. Whereas the Persians are defeated in military campaigns, in which Baybars shows—perhaps somewhat reluctantly—his loyalty to the faith rather than to his ethnic background, the Franks are more persistent, entangling him in a continual sequence of intrigues, campaigns, and schemes. Baybars confronts these challenges indefatigably, always prepared to sacrifice himself for the sake of the Muslims, both in moral and in military issues.

These aspects of Baybars's personality are, of course, intended to compensate for his foreign descent and to provide him with traits that would facilitate his being accepted by the populace. This strategy is especially effective because of the remarkable realism of the *sira* as a whole. When compared to other romances, in the 'Romance of Baybars' miracles, magic, *jinns*, and demons are conspicuously scarce. The supernatural phenomena that are inserted are related to the faith and especially to popular religion and the veneration of saints, and are meant to strengthen his position as a popular leader: Through his contacts with Ahmad al-Badawi and al-Khadir, and the saints prophesying his ascendance, he establishes relations with the supernatural realm, which will secure him the protection of the saints. Thus, the diverse elements of hybridity, between history and fiction, between literary and vernacular narrative, between orthodox and popular religiosity, between foreign and indigenous belonging, are not meant to create a sense of wonder and exceptionality, but rather, through realism, to forge a sense of belonging and integrity, a virtuousness which justifies his acceptance by the common people.

This tendency to depict Baybars as a 'round' and credible character is inspired too by the consideration that—unlike the other examples discussed in this chapter—he combines the roles of the hero and the king. At first he is the hero who is the predestined new king, but who still has to pass through a trajectory in which he has to acquire the virtues of the ideal king that will enable him to identify with his subjects. During this time he has to prove his loyalty to the legitimate king. But since this king has no indigenous roots, the only source of legitimacy is family relationships within the Ayyubid dynasty. In spite of his moral and political stature, Baybars is reluctant to assume power, until the dynastic source of legitimacy has expired. Of course, this reluctance is ambivalent, since Baybars knows that his kingship is predestined and that al-Salih Ayyub has appointed him as his successor. Nevertheless, it provides him with an image of integrity and allows him to construct a new source

of legitimacy: the support of the Mamluk amirs and the Ismaili *fidawis*. The covenant with which he accepts the throne shows how his personal charisma and morality are combined with political acumen and an understanding of the ways to transform power into a solid base of authority.

The Muslims against the Byzantines: Sayyid Battal

The last text that we will briefly discuss in this chapter is an Ottoman-Turkish romance in the style and tradition of the Islamic epics, especially the *Hamzanama*. The hero of the story, Sayyid Battal, is a trickster-hero in the Arabic *sira* of *Dhat al-Himma* which probably dates from the twelfth century and which relates the struggle between the early Muslims and the Byzantines. Here, Sayyid Battal is the main hero and it seems that the Ottoman version of his exploits can be connected with the campaigns of the Ottomans against the Byzantine Emperor in the period before the conquest of Constantinople in 1453. In this respect it shows similarity with the epic 'Umar al-Nu'man and his sons', which is extant both as a part of the *Thousand and one nights* and as a separate text. This story, too, is focused on the struggle between a Muslim king, Umar al-Nu'man, and his sons, to subdue the Byzantine Emperor and conquer the glorious city of Constantinople. In the end the occupation of the city is accomplished not through violence, but through family connections, since at a certain point the Byzantine Emperor turns out to be the (illegitimate) son of Umar and a Greek princess. This epic exists only in Arabic, apparently, although Garcin describes it as an originally Turkish narrative.[48]

In *Sayyid Battal* several episodes of the exploits of the hero are related, which without exception end with the death of the Byzantine Emperor and begin with the accession of a new one. On the side of the Muslims, the successive caliphs al-Mahdi, al-Mu'tasim, and al-Ma'mun play a marginal role as exponents of the framework of religio-political authority. The story is centred in Malatya, in Anatolia, and spreads out to Tarsus, Caesarea, Baghdad, North Africa, and India. As far as its form and narrative procedures are concerned it follows most of the previous romances, although it is less sophisticated: an emblematic hero-adventurer; a rather repetitious series of incidents and battles; a strong religious component; and a historical setting with supernatural elements. The story also includes a period of absence and a visit to the realm of the jinns, sim-

48 For a summary of this story and references, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*; Garcin, *Pour une lecture historique*.

ilar to our other examples. References to the 'seven seas', Solomon, and other motifs reveal its affinity with the *Hamzanama* and the Muslim imagination, and, as we will show below, with the tradition of the Alexander romance. References to the Persian narrative tradition include the figures of Jamasp and Shumas.

In the beginning of the story we find the familiar motifs of interruption and prophecy. This time, however, the prophecy comes not from some anonymous soothsayer or sage, but from the archangel Gabriel himself. While waiting for a new revelation, the Prophet Muhammad is told about the city of Constantinople and its innumerable beauties. Gabriel tells him that after a few hundred years a young man will stand up in Malatya, by the name of Ja'far, who will resemble Hamza and Ali. It is he who will conquer the city for the Muslims and convert the population to Islam. Soon a descendant of Ali, the nephew of the prophet, migrates to Baghdad and subsequently to Malatya. He has a son, Rabi, who begets two sons, Hasan, who is extremely clever, and Husayn, who is a fearsome *bahlawan*, or warrior.

One day, on one of his expeditions, Husayn enters a cave where he finds a strange horse, and all kinds of weapons and coats-of-mail that belonged to David, Isaac, and Hamza. A mysterious voice explains that all this is meant for a certain Ja'far. In a dream Husayn hears that Ja'far will be his son who will become a magnificent warrior and who will convert the Byzantines to Islam. This dream is confirmed by the birth of Ja'far and by the astrologists who foretell a bright future for the young lad. However, while on a hunting party, Husayn is killed by the Byzantines. When Ja'far is fifteen years old—a strong adolescent, well versed in the four religious books, Qur'anic interpretation, and the traditions of the prophets, and with a sound sense of judgement—he decides to avenge his father. He girds on the weapons kept in store for him, collects some brave friends, and sets out to fight the Christians, and, later, a Jewish tyrant in North Africa. He is rather brutal in his methods; captives are summoned to adopt the true faith, and if they refuse they are hit on the head so violently that 'the brains squirted out in all directions'.[49]

The mission of Ja'far is confirmed by the very pious sheykh Abd al-Wahhab, who is 300 years old and has performed the hajj seventy times. He hands him a letter from the prophet, written by Caliph Osman/Uthman, in which Ja'far's destiny is confirmed. He also spits into his mouth some spittle from the prophet personally—the size of a hazelnut—and suddenly Ja'far knows seventy-two

49 *Die Fahrten des Sajjid Batthal. Ein alttürkischer Volks- und Sittenroman*, trans. Hermann Ethé, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1871) vol. 1, 36.

FIGURE 7 *The Ottoman Sultan Bayezid before Timur.* Akbarnama, *ca. 1600.*

languages and twelve sciences. He preserves the letter in an amulet. He also meets the Prophet Khadir several times and the Prophet Elias, who gives him a prayer mat and helps him to revive a dead boy and girl. These miracles show Ja'far's connection with the supernatural forces controlling destiny, which often reveal their signs in dreams. At one point, in the land of Qaf, he meets an effigy of King Alexander, along with one of Aristotle, provided with a table with wise formulae written on it. In the end Ja'far dies as a result of a stone thrown on his chest by the wind, as Fate has decided/ordained.

The adventures of Ja'far/Sayyid Battal are mainly built around the opposition between the Christians and the Muslims (apart from the Jewish sorcerer). The contrast between the good and the bad is quite unambiguous: the Christians are consequently depicted in a negative way and are systematically humiliated. At some points Ja'far disguises himself as a Christian monk, mesmerizing his opponents with his brilliant knowledge of the Bible and its exegesis, even making them believe that he is the Messiah. The Christians, in their turn, swear by al-Lat and Manat—rather incredibly—and threaten to kill the caliph and destroy the Kaaba. They are often drunk and finally have to concede a part of Constantinople to Ja'far, who has a mosque constructed for the Friday prayer. During his campaigns, Ja'far marries several times, remarking dryly when criticized for this, that the prophet had nine wives; so why should he, Ja'far, not have two? In the end he has five or six wives, however.

An intriguing episode is Ja'far's adventure with a serpent queen, which seems to echo the story of 'Hasib Karim al-Din' discussed above (Chapter Three). The episode is introduced by presenting a hero eating from a broth from which a snake has eaten. He swells up and explodes as a result. Subsequently, a vizier named Yamlikha tells about a 'Spring of Hell' on a mountain, into which Ja'far is thrown. At the bottom of the well he is approached by serpents, one of which—a big one—carries a small serpent with an emerald head. She introduces herself as Yamlikha, the Queen of the Serpents, and tells him that after Solomon's death she was captured by Buluqiya and Affan. They held her captive for forty days and took her through the mountains, forcing her to explain the functions of all the wondrous phenomena that they encountered on the way. When she was set free she remained in this well, except for one excursion to see Muhammad. The exit from the well is on Mount Qaf. Ja'far stills his hunger by sucking a magical stone; he falls asleep and succeeds in escaping from the well by clinging to a dragon that flies to the surface of the earth. Ja'far immediately performs prayer and recites Qur'anic verses.

This episode is clearly a garbled, and therefore late, version of the story of 'Hasib Karim al-Din', using the motifs without their original coherence. It does not seem to add anything to the story as a whole, except a colourful motif

and a topical visit of the hero to the underworld. Since the episode is told by Sayyid Battal himself, it even breaks the usual pattern of the narrative, which is told from a third-person perspective. It also refers to the story of Buluqiya, indicating that it was well known at the time, possibly in a Turkish version. These observations, of course, raise intriguing questions with regard to the process of transmission. It is possible that the episode was incorporated into the romance from an Ottoman translation of the 'Jamasp' version, but it may also have been derived from a Persian or Turkish source of another date. Since we know that the story was circulating in the Ottoman Empire, in Turkish and Arabic versions, in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, it seems likely that it was incorporated into the 'Romance of Sayyid Battal' in this period, and that the version of the romance that we possess and that has served as the basis for the German translation used here was not compiled at a later date.

As far as visions of kingship are concerned, the narrative is somewhat ambiguous. It portrays 'evil' kings, in the person of the Byzantine emperors and the Jewish sorcerer-king, and legitimate caliphs. The caliphs, however, have a formal role only, because a separate transmission of legitimacy goes directly from Ali and Muhammad to Sayyid Battal, who, therefore, accumulates a high potential of charismatic authority. He is not a king, however, and not even the governor of Malatya, and he acknowledges the sovereignty of the caliph. This ambiguity seems to reflect the situation of the Ottomans at a certain stage in their ascendancy to prominence. The narrative more or less secures their credentials as fighters for the true faith, projecting their power into religious history, and justifying their further expansion to Constantinople—the site of a legitimate, though infidel, dynasty of emperors. The story brings together all the elements necessary to buttress a claim to kingship within the Muslim realm, without being rooted in the Arabic ethnic or linguistic domain. It is the combination of martial strength, religious charisma, and inclusion into the discourse of popular literature and religion that defined the Ottoman claims to what became a powerful sultanate.

Concluding Remarks

In his study of the fictionalized biographies of Timur Lang that appeared in the eighteenth century in Turkish and Persian, Ron Sela attempts to link the expansion of popular literature to specific historical circumstances. Why did these *Timurnama*s become popular particularly in the eighteenth century? Are they a reflection of efforts to confront a societal and political crisis that required

new self-definitions and new visions of the past and the future? Sela's investigations show the importance of situating narratives of this kind—generally indicated as romances of chivalry—within a specific historical setting. They show, too, on the other hand, that by responding to specific situations, they refer to and mobilize concepts, ideas, and discourses that transcend specific historical periods and that are gleaned from traditions with a much broader historical, cultural, and literary scope. It may even be their function to break out of confined cultural/political spaces and link societies in crisis to their wider environment, thereby connecting traditional elements with new impulses and vitality to construct a vision of the future. It seems that this kind of literature is precisely conceived for this aim: to preserve ahistorical, trans-historical, or essential concepts and discourses within a narrative 'container' to confront and assimilate new tendencies in order to realize a new equilibrium. These narratives should provide continuity, but allow for transformation over the course of time.[50]

In several instances, Sela compares the *Timurnama* with the 'Romance of Baybars' that we analysed above. Both texts are fictionalized biographies; both texts are about the rise to power of a forsaken infant, following an earlier prophecy; both texts are legitimations of rulership not rooted in tradition that they attempt to embed in a broader context; both texts contain elements of mysticism and popular religion; both texts, finally, are about heroes hailing from Central Asia. Of course, these similarities may be coincidental, as they are to some extent influenced by generic conventions and thus imposed by the nexus between form and content, They may also be the result of direct influence, however, rendering the 'Romance of Baybars' into a kind of transformed *Timurnama*, containing the same values and tastes. It is also possible that the 'Romance of Baybars' and the *Timurnama* have similar characteristics because they belong to a period in which similar visions, needs, and tastes emerged. In this third hypothesis, the resemblance in generic conventions and the popularity of the genre are not coincidental or the result of direct influence, but rather the effect of a broader space of transmission and the formation of new common interests and concerns. Perhaps in Egypt a sense of crisis occurred similar to that of Central Asia, while simultaneously Central Asia—represented by the figures of Timur and Baybars—was experienced as part of a familiar discursive tradition. It is perhaps not inevitable, but also not a coincidence, that so much of the material discussed in this chapter is datable to the period 1500–1800, and

50 Ron Sela, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane. Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge etc., 2011).

in particular to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when a new phase of Eurasian interactions set in.

In their multifaceted hybridity, the romances fit nicely into the category of semi-popular literature, combining elements from popular lore with courtly discourses of authority. As Sela aptly phrases it for the *Timurnama*:

> The two historical realms, the courtly and the popular, were connected by the circumstances of their formation and the issues that they addressed—from the changing perceptions of the ruler's identity and the legitimacy of its rule, [...] to the relationship between religion and state; from their interpretations of traditions and invocation of sources of inspiration to their understanding of their place in the world.[51]

As such, the narratives are clearly bound by generic imperatives, defining form, structure, and motifs to a large extent, showing remarkable parallels. Besides these procedural aspects, we encounter some motifs that transcend the generic type and can be linked to narratives of other types, discussed in the previous chapters, such as the motif of interruption, prophecy, and destiny, and, significantly, the composite nature of power and authority. When authority is concentrated in the figure of the king, it is highly symbolic, even abstract; in order to be efficient, it needs to be linked to the *ad hoc* insights of viziers and the *ad hoc* power of the hero-warriors. This connection can lead to harmony only if all participants are unified in a moral idea, a common vision of the moral constituents of the community and rulership.

This ideological component is directly connected to the formal characteristics of the narratives, such as the enactment of the intrigues, the distribution and nature of the various roles, the binarity of the narrative dynamics, the emblematic nature of protagonists and events, the embedding in popular culture, etc. This seems to be the common ground in which dialectic views shape common discourses, where the daily practices of power can be transformed into the symbolic meanings in which values can be explained, exemplified, and preserved, as a framework to confront historical disruptions. Although the geographical and cultural parameters are often vague, the romances do evoke a sense of communality, often related to centres of power and symbolic capital. Constantinople is an exemplary case of a city that has hoarded so many historical connotations that it can easily survive—and perhaps even requires—the transition from Greek to Turkish domination.

---

51 Ibid., 141.

As we have seen, cultural, linguistic, ethnic, and political markers all have a role in the interplay between centripetal and centrifugal forces, determining the distribution of good and evil, enemies and allies. But a community is primarily defined by its moral values and its ability to project these onto their king. To achieve this, the hero acts both as a container, collecting the required symbols of morality, and as a medium, imbuing these values in society, and, especially, in the figure of the king, in order to restore the equilibrium between moral contents and historical forces and to preserve or revitalize the exemplary role of the king. We have seen that in several of the romances the influence of women is of vital importance, mostly in a positive sense. In the next chapter we will highlight some aspects of the female role in the issues that are so central in discourses of kingship and that usually derive their narrative potential from a forceful phenomenon: love.

CHAPTER 5

Kingship and Love

In almost all narratives discussed until now the intrigue is at least partly built on issues of love, sexuality, eroticism, or adultery. It can be argued that there is hardly any fictional text that does not in some way or other refer to the relationship between men and women, and that the references in these texts therefore do not add significance to their potential meaning. In fact, as suggested in Chapter One, the love intrigues in the story may be no more than a device to insert a dramatic element into the narrative to turn it into a form of fiction. Still, from our discussion it is clear that the intervention of women, and concomitantly the intricacies of love and sexuality, play an important role in organizing and imaging concepts, arguments, and roles. It is perhaps justified to say that by often being the instigator of the dramatization of events, women represent an additional layer within the discursive representations of kingship. Here, again, it is clear in most cases that power and authority are not monolithic phenomena, concentrated in one person and one discourse, but are composed of different roles and various discursive elements.

It is remarkable that in spite of the omnipresence of women in our narratives, there is no woman presented as possessing absolute power or as a symbol of rulership. Women are often staged as destroyers of imperial harmony or dynastic stability, but they are not normally rulers themselves. Although they have a prominent role, they are still in many respects marginalized, relegated to a subordinate discourse rather than integrated into the main discourse of ideal kingship. In some cases they even represent a counter-discourse inserted to more forcefully construct the pretensions of male dominance. The omnipresence of women indicates, too, that they are in several ways endowed with power and authority, either because they share in the claims to legitimacy of the king, or because of their power to challenge constructions of male authority by their sexual powers and appeal to the emotions. In both cases, their freedom to act is restrained by traditions and conventions that impose obedience and prescribed forms of propriety.

It is the incongruence between the powers of women and their essentially subservient roles that brings forth their potential as a source of narrative intrigues. Their roles can roughly be summarized as twofold. First, in the cycles analysed in the first two chapters women are depicted as the embodiment of irrationality, perfidy, emotions, and unreliability. The imperial and royal spouses and concubines literally throw in their body to challenge the abstract

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_007
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

principles of kingship, by manipulating princes, emperors, and kings, forcing them to reconsider their roles. As we have argued above, through this manipulation they introduce a situation of interruption and, more importantly, of dialogue, a mechanism to revitalize and restore the foundations of authority. They are, so to speak, the ones who break the silence under which the principles of sound, rational rule lie hidden. In this clearly misogynous view, the basic rule is that the element represented by women should be controlled, disciplined, and encapsulated in a discourse of rationality.

The second set of roles, which is much more positive, is found in several of the chivalric romances discussed in Chapter Three. In some of the romances the role of women is completely marginal. In *Yue Fei*, for instance, the main female characters are Yue Fei's mother, who secures his survival after the flood, the gallant wife of a provincial governor who leads the defence of the city, and the wife of Prime Minister Zhang, who prevents 'human relationships' from falling apart by letting the emperor escape. There is, of course, also a perfidious concubine. In *Sayyid Battal* the role of women is even more marginal since it is virtually reduced to either victims of male aggression or objects of the lust of the hero. Similarly, in *Hang Tuah* women are seductive but completely subjected to men, although in one episode the hero is rather permissively entertained by a queen. In *Baybars*, finally, women are more prominent. In Damascus the young Baybars is 'adopted' by a notable lady; in Cairo Baybars defends young women lusted after by wicked old men; and Shajarat al-Durr, the wife of al-Salih Ayyub, plays a prominent role in the struggle for the succession of the king. Moreover, Baybars marries a Mongolian girl and promises her to remain monogamous. In these stories women are not part of the structure of power, but rather 'objects', which are instrumental, rather than essential, in preserving the structure of male power, both morally and practically.

The cases of Tirant and Hamza are more complex. Here, women are involved in the structures of power and authority, and there is some attention to the various aspects of the phenomenon of love. In *Tirant* love is present from the very beginning, when William of Warwick, intending to retreat from public life after his pilgrimage, says farewell to his wife. In the tournament in which Tirant participates women have their familiar courtly role. They are the symbolic beloveds of the knights who pledge to fight and strive in their honour, and they are even included in the membership of the new order founded by the English king. Women clearly represent the complementary component within the concept of knighthood: They are the standard of virtue and loyalty, and therefore add a symbolic, cultural element into a system which is based on formal acknowledgement and hierarchy, and, of course, power and fighting. Later Tirant arranges the marriage between one of the princes of France and

the princess of Sicily, an episode that exploits the playfulness of erotic advances and combines it with the exigencies of dynastic procreation: marriage is meant not only to perpetuate the dynasty, but also to link the main royal families of Christianity.

Tirant is thus not adverse to eroticism and love, and the two elements converge in his protracted courting of the Byzantine Princess Carmesina. This courtship not only gives occasion for several farcical scenes—Tirant breaking a leg while climbing out of Carmesina's bedroom—and for quite explicit descriptions of their erotic encounters; it also results in somewhat elaborate contemplations and exchanges about the nature of love, the nature of women, and the rules of propriety. Tirant is perplexed by his new and overwhelming sensations of love, disturbing his usual boldness, and the actual story is interrupted several times for polemic debates about love and the ways it should be effectuated into sexual union. These debates involve not only Tirant and the princess but also several ladies of the court and friends of the hero, who either encourage or rebuke the two lovers. In the arguments many references are made to Classical history, literature, and mythology, thereby incorporating the experience of the lovers in a cultural, moral, and aesthetic framework. In a narrative sense, the love component is an instrument for deferral: as long as the courtship of the hero continues, the story can unfold without suspense slackening, until in the end legal marriage and the defeat of the Turks conclude the narrative dynamics.

In a similar vein, in *Hamzanama* Princess Mehr-Nigar is the object of the hero's love. She is the precious jewel to whom all his endeavours are dedicated and who symbolizes his being accepted and acknowledged within the royal hierarchy, and the preservation of traditional legitimacy, which is in need of revitalization. The princess is actually the link between the two eras evoked in the narrative, the old Persian kingship of the Sassanids and the new moral and religious order of Islam. The continuity between the two is secured as soon as the son of Hamza and Mehr-Nigar ascends the throne. Apart from this key position in the imperial structure, Mehr-Nigar is also the distinguished recipient of Hamza's love. Like Tirant, Hamza is dumbfounded by his passion, and, like his French counterpart, he also breaks a leg while secretly visiting her bedroom. In *Tirant* with the setbacks in his courtship, due to vicious intrigues, considerations of decency, or narrative turns, the love element serves as a mechanism of postponement to preserve suspense while the story unfolds. Here, however, the beloved more and more transforms into a precious object, carried from one castle to another, without any real importance. The marriage is consummated at a certain point, but Hamza's love becomes diluted, and he has sexual relations with several other women and jinniyya's.

As in *Tirant*, in *Hamzanama*, too, the force of the experience of love leads to contemplation, but in the latter work it is limited to the lament of the princess's female attendants:

> Go take these tidings to your mother the nanny, [...] so that she may busy herself in effecting a remedy, and the violence of the princess' passion might subside in some way. Or else love—that destroyer of house and home—will spread roots, and its victim loses all sense of shame and decorum, and soils all name and honor. It disrupts the sane functioning of the mind, blanches the bright-red rose to a saffron-yellow hue, brings on raving madness, exposes one of the urchin's stone pelting; blights the one exposed to its breath, inverts the reason, makes one suffer cold sighs and hot lamentations with every breath, bids one to impetuously shatter the fragile glass of his name and honour, leaves one in complete stupefaction, causes one's head to be broken by stones, plugs one's ears with the cotton of heedlessness, and commands one not to lend one's ear to any counsel.[1]

Clearly, love is feared primarily for its destructive influence, and the concept of love expressed here contains both the potential unreliability of women and the necessity of the female contribution to the preservation of the dynasty. As in many Arabic romances, young princesses of a marriageable age are a danger to social stability, because they threaten the very foundation of patriarchal authority by conceding to their sexual impulses. Since women are the containers of the moral integrity of the community, the transition of women from paternal to matrimonial authority should be carefully and smoothly, but if necessary also forcefully, arranged.

From this brief survey we can now see more clearly the essential paradox of the female role in narratives of kingship: on the one hand, they are marginal, especially where official power and authority are concerned, but, on the other hand, they are powerful in their symbolic status; on the one hand, they are a threat to the stability and continuity of the dynasty, but, on the other hand, they have an essential role in securing dynastic continuity; on the one hand, they disrupt monologic discourses of authority, but, on the other hand, they are needed to open up and interpret the discourses of authority by creating dialogic situations; on the one hand, they disturb abstract, rational, principles with their physicality, but, on the other hand, they necessitate the harmonization of

1 Lakhnavi and Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, 184.

these principles to specific events. By acting out these sometimes paradoxical roles, women become a vital part of the constellation of authority.

In the following sections we will discuss two clusters of narratives that are especially relevant for examining the element of love in pre-modern narratives of kingship. The first cluster concerns a network of Arabic-Persian and Hindavi love romances, which not only throws light on the combination of love and kingship as narrative themes, but also on the ways in which narrative material was recycled within the Islamic cultural realm. For the second cluster we turn to Europe to see how the chivalric romance gradually transformed into romances of love and, ultimately, the love-novel. Here we can see how the idea of the Orient played a crucial role in the development of European literature, especially within the genre of the romance, while later, from the seventeenth century onwards, the combination of exoticism and literary experiment gave rise to a new textual complexity, which seems to differentiate the European tradition from its Asian counterparts. This development, which is reflected in forms of self-reflexivity, using mirror-images and textual layers, becomes more prominent in the eighteenth century. We have already noticed this development in our discussion of Potocki's *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse*, in Chapter Three, and will encounter more examples in the present chapter and Chapter Six.

The Prince and the Mysteries of Love

We have argued above that processes of literary influence and transmission are both fluid and, to a certain extent, structured within historical embeddings, as is exemplified by the textual history of the *Thousand and one nights*. It is obvious from the collection itself that it contains material from various cultural spheres, Arabic and non-Arabic, Islamic and non-Islamic. Because of this diversity we can speak of the *Thousand and one nights* as a coherent text only from a relatively late date, perhaps no sooner than the end of the eighteenth century. Thus, the history of the text must be detached from the history of the separate stories, most of which have become part of the collection at a late stage. The fact that a certain story at a certain point was incorporated into the collection is not without significance, of course, but it tells us nothing about the trajectory it followed to arrive there. Even worse, its being integrated into the larger framework of the *Nights* may lead to new textual/philological and interpretive difficulties, because it may have been adapted or put in a different context.

In this section we will discuss the possible connections between three stories from the *Thousand and one nights* and two Indian romances that are so similar

that a relationship inescapably imposes itself. The three Arabic stories are those of 'Sayf al-Muluk and Princess Badi al-Jamal', 'Janshah', and 'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur', all remarkable love/adventure stories. The Indian romances are the love/Sufi romances 'Mirigavati', by the Hindavi poet Qutban Suhravardi, written in 1503, and 'Madhumalati' by Manjhan Rajgiri, who began its composition in 1545. The similarities between these stories are so striking, that the problem for the researcher is not so much to prove their relationship, but rather to explain the differences. For this reason, we will dedicate considerable attention to aspects of textual history and then concentrate on aspects of discourses of kingship.

Within the diverse generic spectrum of the *Thousand and one nights* the stories of 'Sayf'al-Muluk' and 'Janshah' belong to a special kind of love/adventure story, which involves the love union between man and jinn. In both cases a prince falls in love with a *jinniyya* and has to struggle to conquer her and arrange a steady relationship. In both cases one of the structuring elements is Solomon, who governs the domain of the forces of nature, the animals, and the jinn. The romance of 'Mirigavati' belongs to a particular group of poetic narratives that emerged in Delhi and the Eastern provinces of the Mughal Empire between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries and that were connected with the religious upsurge and the rise of Sufi movements, especially the Chishti order, in this period. They were written in Hindavi and can be characterized as an amalgamation of love stories and Sufi allegories. They are remarkable most of all because of their syncretism, since they contain a curious mix of Hindi and Muslim elements and show traces of Persian, Arabic, Sanskrit, and popular literary influences. It is this internal compositeness combined with its layered meanings which makes it difficult to situate these stories in generic and cultural frameworks. Adding to the complexity, the unicity of these narratives seems to reveal that the contexts in which they should be fitted are far from clear and perhaps even more confusing than clarifying.

The Story of 'Mirigavati'

When the protagonist of the story of 'Mirigavati', Prince Raj Kunvar of Candragiri, is born, it is prophesied that he will suffer much grief because of a woman.[2] As an adolescent, one day he sees a seven-coloured doe. He follows her, but she disappears into a lake, whereupon the prince builds a sumptu-

2 Qutban Suhravardi, *The Magic Doe. Qutban Suhravardi's Mirigavati*, trans. Aitya Behl (Oxford, 2012).

ous palace on the bank. After some time he sees seven nymphs playing in the lake, and he captures one of them by stealing her sari. He declares his love for her, but Mirigavati—as she is called—is reluctant and wants to be his slave-girl only. Not long afterwards she flies away, summoning him, if he really covets her, to follow her to Kancanpur, the City of Gold. Raj Kunvar then dresses himself as a yogi and departs on his journey, asking travellers and hermits which way to go. He crosses a tumultuous ocean and escapes from man-eating serpents before arriving at a palace. Here a gorgeous princess is held prisoner by a demon who has captured her. The prince kills the demon and marries the princess, who is called Rupmini, but the union is not consummated.

Not long afterwards, the prince pretends to go hunting, but instead he takes a ship to continue the search for his beloved. On the way he is caught by a cannibal herdsman, with fearsome eyes, from whom he escapes by hiding in a goatskin. Then he reaches the Palace of the Doves, filled with magical birds, who show him the way to the City of Gold. After his arrival there Raj Kunvar is united with Mirigavati, and they indulge their passion. Later, Mirigavati forbids him to open one of the rooms of the palace, but the prince cannot contain his curiosity and is kidnapped by a demon, who throws him into the ocean. He survives, however, and finds his way back to the City of Gold. After their second reunion, Raj Kunvar returns to his hometown, picking up his other wife on the way, but the two wives are jealous and quarrel with each other. Finally, Raj Kunvar goes out to hunt and is killed by a tiger. His two spouses are burned and follow their husband in death.

Before discussing the themes and potential meanings of the story of 'Mirigavati', we will first summarize the stories of 'Janshah' and 'Sayf al-Muluk', to show the many similar motifs. The story of 'Janshah' begins in a typical fashion with an old king who has no heir. Astrologers advise him to marry a certain princess, and when a son is born, they predict that he will be exposed to great danger, but, if he survives, he will become powerful and happy. As a young man, Janshah goes out hunting with his friends and follows a beautifully coloured gazelle, who, however, escapes by jumping into the sea. Still, the company succeeds in catching the gazelle, but they decide to have a look at an island. On the way back they are blown out into to the open sea and lose their way. From here Janshah embarks on a journey over the seas, going from one marvellous island to another, meeting all kinds of dangers on the way. He encounters men who twitter like birds and split themselves in halves; he is imprisoned by a tribe of apes in a crystal palace; he is saved by an army of ants, and ends up in a Jewish town. There he is hired for a strange job: he is asked to hide in a mule skin and be taken by a giant bird to a mountain top, where he has to throw down pre-

cious stones. From there he wanders on and finds the palace of Sheykh Naṣr, the king of the birds, near the Qaf mountain. Here he receives the keys to all the rooms of the palace except one. Janshah nevertheless enters the forbidden room and sees a terrace with a pond and a small palace made of precious stones. Suddenly three birds appear, which take off their robes of feathers and are transformed into beautiful girls who start playing in the pond. Then they put on their coats of feathers and fly away. Janshah, passionately enamoured, hears that the bird-girls are *jinniyya*s who return every year. After waiting for their return he succeeds in capturing the most beautiful girl by stealing her robe of feathers. The girl agrees to become his wife, and they return to his country to be married and to be reunited with his parents.

On an ominous day Shamsa, his *jinniyya* wife, recuperates her feathers and flies away, saying to Janshah: 'If you love me as much as I love you, follow me to the gem-castle Takni.' Janshah once again embarks on an adventurous journey, helped by birds and hermits, and after many hardships finds his beloved Shamsa. The couple is married for the second time and decide to spend one year in her palace and one year in Janshah's town. But when resting on one of their journeys, Shamsa goes bathing in the sea and is killed by a shark. Janshah spends his remaining days mourning at her grave.[3]

We can see, even from these brief summaries, how the stories of 'Mirigavati' and 'Janshah' are linked by similar themes and motifs. The story of 'Sayf al-Muluk and Badi al-Jamal', too, shows some remarkable resemblances. The story begins with the familiar old king without an heir and an ominous prophecy. As an adolescent, Sayf finds the portrait of a girl in a present given to him by the prophet Solomon. He falls in love and sets out to find his beloved, Badi al-Jamal, the daughter of a *jinn*-king. After long peregrinations to China and India he is stranded on several islands with demons who sit on his shoulders, man-eating giants, giant apes, and crocodiles, before finally reaching a castle where a beautiful maiden is held captive by a lustful *jinn*. Sayf kills the jinn by destroying his soul, which is kept in a chest in the ocean, and takes the girl—who is Dawlat Khatun, the foster sister of Badi al-Jamal—with him on a raft. After long wanderings they arrive in India where he is reunited with his friend Sa'id, who was born on the same day as Sayf and who recounts to him his own adventures, especially his escape from a man-eating giant, whom he vanquished by blinding him with a red-hot stick. Subsequently, Sayf is united

3 For summaries and references, see Marzolph and Van Leeuwen, *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*; *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, vol. 2, 390–453; see also Van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights*.

with Badi al-Jamal. However, even before marrying her, he is kidnapped by a jinn. After being rescued he is wedded to his beloved. Dawlat Khatun is married to Sa'id.[4]

All three stories are rich in potential meanings, references, and narrative procedures, but we will first confine ourselves to a discussion of their similarities and their possible interpretations. The first parallel that catches the eye is found on the level of generic characteristics and categories. All three stories are love stories; they are all quests for the beloved one, in the form of adventurous journeys; and they are all related to the succession to the throne of a young king and the perpetuation of the dynasty. The element of prophecy suggests a connection between the destiny of the hero and supernatural forces, strengthening the sense of liminality evoked by the state of the hero as an adolescent and heir to the throne. The hero enters a phase of transition and has to be initiated into the ways of the world, especially the nature of love. After he has conquered his beloved, he has to be reintegrated with his new status into the conventions and institutions of the dynasty. Only then will the dynasty and the empire be preserved. These uncertainties and hazards of the liminal phase are metaphorically shaped by the 'chronotope' of the journey: the hero has to experience dangerous peregrinations to reach his destination and his destiny. These components would typify the stories as love-journeys that constitute a phase of transition for the hero, and would situate them in the category of love-romances. However, the prophecies add another layer to them: it is not only love between two beautiful adolescents that drives the plot; their love is controlled by destiny and linked to supernatural forces. The combination of these elements would situate the three stories in a single generic category, although, as we will see, the ways in which the thematic parallels are elaborated in the narrative itself are different.

The summaries show that 'Mirigavati' contains elements of both 'Sayf' and 'Janshah'. With 'Janshah' it shares the central motifs of the gazelle, as the 'object' that leads the hero astray, creating a desire in him that separates him from his regular environment, apparently as an instrument of fate, together with the, always insecure and confusing, element of water. The second motif is that of the bird-girls, beautiful maidens who bathe in a pond. Raj Kunvar and Janshah both fall in love and conquer their beloveds by stealing their garments, respectively, a sari and a robe of feathers. Subsequently, in both stories the lovers are separated because the girl flies away to her remote homeland, inciting the hero to follow her. The hero then departs on a journey across the seas, which takes him to

4 *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, vol. 3, 95–145.

a 'castle of birds' where magic birds convene and from where he succeeds in finding the abode of his beloved. Finally, a common motif is the forbidden room, and the inability of the hero to refrain from entering it.

The parallels between 'Mirigavati' and 'Sayf' are to be found mainly in the second half of the stories: the journey and the union of the lovers. A perhaps surprising common motif is that of the Cyclops, which of course brings to mind its counterparts in the *Odyssey* and in the Oriental traditions, for instance in the Sindbad cycle of the *Thousand and one nights* and in the Turkic epic *Dede Korkut* (thirteenth century). The occurrence of this motif here would strengthen the hypothesis of an Oriental origin of the motif of the gobble-eyed or one-eyed, man-eating giant and the escape of the hero in a sheepskin.[5] A second common motif is the kidnapping of the hero after the reunion of the lovers. In both cases it is a vicious jinn/demon that drags the prince away out of revenge or jealousy. Both demons have their souls hidden outside their 'bodies'.

Apart from these motifs, a remarkable parallel lies in the episode of the maiden who is kept prisoner in a castle by a jinn/demon. Both Raj Kunvar and Sayf interrupt their quests to rescue the (human) princess, and Raj Kunvar even marries her, in spite of his search for his true beloved. Although the marriage is not consummated, at the end of the story the prince has two wives, which apparently is not uncommon in romances of this type, as we will see. In 'Sayf' this problem is solved by the sudden appearance of Sa'id, who until then has not played a significant role in the story and seems to have been inserted only to solve the narrative complication of the second unmarried princess. The episode serves only to give Sayf the chance to remedy an injustice and prevent a mismatch between a human princess and a *jinn*-prince, as an instrument of fate, and to receive a reward for his bravery.[6]

It is clear, that the similarities between 'Mirigavati' and the two Arabic stories are strong enough to surmise a structural relationship between them. But it is the many similarities that make a look at the differences the more interesting. The main difference lies in the manner in which the stories are told. Whereas the stories of 'Sayf' and 'Janshah' are recounted in a rather frugal style, not without humour and sharp observations, but without elaborate descriptions or poetic excursions, 'Mirigavati' is a sophisticated work of poetry, containing

5 James E. Montgomery, 'Al-Sindibad and Polyphemus: Reflections on the Genesis of an Archetype', in: Angelika Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar, eds., *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach* (Stuttgart and Beirut, 1999) 437–466.

6 Richard van Leeuwen, 'De *Duizend en één nacht* en de *Odyssee*: een neoplatonistische omzwerving', Stichting Zenobia (Amsterdam, 2014).

long descriptive passages, both about the beauty of the protagonists and about their passions and hardships. Whereas in the cases of 'Sayf' and 'Janshah' the narrative form is of secondary importance, in 'Mirigavati' the poetic form seems to be just as important as the contents of the story, giving the work as a whole much more balance and coherence. It appears that in 'Sayf' and 'Janshah' the adventure of the journey, with its marvels and wonders, provides the main interest of the story, while in 'Mirigavati' it is the fulfilment of the desire and the union of the two main lovers.

This difference in form and purport of the Indian story and its Arabic counterparts can partly be explained by the Indian concept of *rasa*, which is the basic structuring principle of the romance as a whole and of romances of this type more generally. The notion of *rasa* refers to an aesthetic feeling or harmony in which (poetic) beauty, sophistication, sensuality, and emotional fulfilment converge to support both the experience of love and literary appreciation. Thus, the hero—and the author—is not only in search of his beloved, but also of the ideal of *rasa*, which requires self-sacrifice, courage, endurance, and refinement. The ultimate proof of Raj Kunvar having internalized *rasa* in his relationship with Mirigavati arrives when he is united with her and has made love to her. The sexual act is described in an imaginative and explicit way, and afterwards Mirigavati brags to her friends about Raj Kunvar's sexual proficiency, which is evidence of the presence of *rasa*.[7]

In contrast, the stories of 'Janshah' and 'Sayf' seem to be preoccupied mainly with the difficulties of matching humans and *jinns*, rather than the celebration of their blissful harmony. The story of 'Sayf' begins with Sayf's conception, brought about through a recipe given by the prophet Solomon, suggesting the link between his fate and the realm of the *jinns*. As a young man he is confronted with the difficult task of leaving the human world and venturing into the world of the *jinns* to find his beloved. When he has found her, she is doubtful about the possibility of a union between a man and a *jinniyya*, because humans are unreliable and unfaithful. Her grandmother, too, is sceptical, and it is remarkable that Sayf and Badi's marriage is not confirmed by witnesses and a contract, as is the marriage of Sa'id and Dawlat Khatun. In 'Janshah', too, the thematic emphasis seems to be on the incompatibility of humans and *jinns*. There is a clear separation of the two domains, guarded by boundaries and taboos, and by unimaginable distances and strange lands, and in the end the union is broken by the violent death of Shamsa.

7 This interpretation of the story is based mainly on Aditya Behl, *Love's Subtle Magic. An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, Wendy Doniger, ed. (Oxford, 2012).

Sufis and Solomon

In his monograph about the four Hindavi romances, 'Mirigavati', 'Madhumalatī', 'Padmavati' and 'Candayan', Aditya Behl tries to clarify both the potential meanings and the cultural-literary contexts of the texts. His hypothesis is that the authors were mystic poets who participated in the revival of Sufism in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries during the rise of the Mughal sultans. According to Behl, the challenge of these poets was 'to make their spiritual agenda comprehensible and appealing in an Indian cultural landscape, using local terms, symbols, techniques, and gods.'[8] This challenge was taken on, first, by applying a surprising measure of syncretism, such as we have seen in *Hang Tuah* and *Les 32 marches du trône*. It is remarkable for an Islamic text to contain heroes with Hindi names and references to Indian literary works such as the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, and even holy texts such as the *Rig Veda*. Although Muhammad and the one God are mentioned, an appeal is made to Gods of the Hindu pantheon, including Indra, 'the king of the Gods'.[9] In addition, the Sanskrit concept of *rasa*, the personage of the yogi, and the self-immolation of women are crucial elements in the story taken from Hindu traditions.

A second strategy of the Sufi poets, according to Behl, is to use the Hindavi language and elements of popular folklore to construct a love story that fits into the local worldview. The element of the quest for the beloved, of course, allows for adventures, passion, and, above all, a trajectory and an initiation that structure the story on various levels. The journey inaugurates a state of liminality for the hero, preparing his tumultuous encounter with the world, disguised as a yogi, and pushing him forward to his initiation into love and the fulfilment of his desire. This form would not only conform to Indian popular tales and satisfy local literary tastes; it can also function as a symbolic representation of the Sufi message that it contains: the quest of the hero for mystical insight and spiritual experience. The story is thus an allegory using religious syncretism and the associative force of the love story to convey a coherent mystical message.

The different levels of meaning in the story can also explain the rather odd combination of the two marriages of the hero. According to Behl, Mirigavati is a semi-divine figure, a magical creature, taking on the shape of a doe, and capable of assuming all shapes. She symbolizes the divine presence that is the ultimate aim of the Sufi. Rupmini, in contrast, is an ordinary human princess,

8 Ibid., 1.

9 Ibid., 117, 122.

FIGURE 8
Emperor Huizong, Listening to the Qin, *China, ca. 11th century.*

representing the earthly domain, material possessions, and worldly pleasures. She is rescued by Raj Kunvar, but then relinquished in favour of Mirigavati. She represents merely a stage in Raj Kunvar's trajectory, and he returns to her only after having found Mirigavati, taking his marital rights by force after having abstained from her previously. Thus, apparently, *rasa* can be truly achieved, for a human being, only by amalgamating with the divine presence. The state of *rasa* is spiritual, a *unio mystica*, which is here followed by Raj Kunvar's death, which, according to Behl, is the mystical loss of the self, or *fanā*'.[10]

The mystical level of meaning that Behl observes in the romance of 'Mirigavati' appears to contrast sharply with the apparent non-allegorical purport of 'Sayf' and 'Janshah'. Here the quest for the beloved is the aim of the journey, but, as has been said above, this quest is quite explicitly linked to the forces of fate, by the interpenetration of the domains of the human and supernatural worlds. The central structuring element in both stories is the figure of King Solomon. In 'Sayf' this is clear from the beginning, since Sayf's father consults Solomon about how to beget a heir and Sayf receives a garment with the image of Badi al-Jamal from Solomon. Thus, from the onset the boundary between the human and supernatural realms is clearly permeable. Nevertheless, if the passion of Sayf is perhaps incited by fate, it is also based on a mistake, since Badi al-Jamal's mother had given the garment to Solomon in an effort to arrange a marriage between him and her daughter.

The crossing of the boundary between the two realms is therefore both irregular and decreed by fate. The irregularity is mirrored in the episode of Dawlat Khatun, a human princess, and the jinn prince. This is a clear mismatch, which is set straight by Sayf and ultimately leads him to his beloved Badi al-Jamal. Even then, when Sayf is united with Badi al-Jamal and both profess their love, the question of the compatibility of the two species is discussed, turning it into one of the main themes of the story. In a similar way, in 'Janshah', too, Solomon is one of the main structuring elements. Janshah crosses a boundary when he enters the palace of the *jinniyya*s and opens the forbidden door. His journeys are marked by signs from Solomon, indicating that he wanders through a supernatural realm, governed by Solomon and his helpers. Here, too, the ultimate question is whether the union between a *jinniyya* and a human man is possible, however passionate their love may be.

If we compare these interpretations of the three stories, it is clear that they are all concerned with the exploration of forms of esoteric knowledge, a conclusion strengthened by the incorporation of the story of 'Janshah' into

10 Ibid., 17, 19.

the cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents' in the *Thousand and one nights*, an eschatological cycle including material related to the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiya*, or *vitae prophetorum* (see Chapter Three), and by the story framing the story of 'Sayf', in which it is related how the story was found and which contains the warning that it should not be told to an ignorant audience. However, although the theme of initiation is similar, the elaboration of the esoteric theme is completely different, Janshah and Sayf associating the esoteric knowledge to the realm of Solomon and the jinn, the *qiṣaṣ al-anbiya* and the segment of creation that contains the mechanisms through which Solomon regulates the natural forces, while in 'Mirigavati' it is the realm of the Divine that is sought, albeit symbolically, and a mystical state only symbolized by sexuality and love. Raj Kunvar's journey is a moral trajectory rather than an exploration of the world of the unseen. Because 'Mirigavati' is a symbolic story, it would, in spite of all the resemblances, belong to a quite different genre than 'Sayf' and 'Janshah'. Apparently the authors, using the same narrative material, aimed to represent different domains of the religio-cultural tradition.

The relationship between the three stories studied here is buttressed by a second Sufi romance, titled 'Madhumalati' and written by Sheykh Mir Sayyid Manjhan Rajgiri of the Shattari order in 1545. This story contains several motifs also found in the story of 'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur' in the *Thousand and one nights*,[11] affirming the link between the two corpuses of narrative material. Starting with the familiar motifs of the absent heir and the prophecy about the fate of the newly born prince, the story continues as a love story. The prince and his beloved are brought together by two flying nymphs, and after their encounter they exchange rings before being transported back home. The prince, finding the ring when he wakes up, embarks on his quest, dressed as a yogi, meeting on his way a princess who has been captured by a demon. After killing the demon by cutting a tree containing its source of life, he takes the princess with him, without marrying her, until he finds his true beloved. These motifs resemble, in particular, the stories of 'Qamar al-Zaman' and 'Sayf al-Muluk', and here, as in the latter story, a second prince is staged quite unexpectedly to marry the spurned princess. Other parallel motifs are the pavilion with paintings revealing the state of mind of the beloved, and the fowler who captures Madhumalati after she has been transformed into a bird. It is noteworthy that the story of 'Qamar al-Zaman' ends with the hero being married to two wives, like Raj Kunvar and similar to the second-princess motif in 'Sayf' and 'Madhumalati', an anomaly that can be solved only by attaching

11 *The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights*, vol. 1, 693–780.

a sequel, the story of 'As'ad and Amjad'. In this case, too, there is a difference in genre: whereas 'Madhumalati' is a Sufi allegory, according to Behl, 'Qamar al-Zaman' is an unmitigated love story.

The intriguing question, after these brief comparisons, is, of course, how we should evaluate the strong connections between these stories. Is it possible to establish the nature of their relationship? Is it possible to situate them within a single cultural, historical, literary framework? In his study of the corpus, Aditya Behl tries to reconstruct the framework in which the transmission of this material can be understood and explained. However, his analysis remains somewhat vague. On the one hand, he argues, mainly by discussing the Cyclops motif in the 'Sindbad' cycle and the 'Mirigavati', that apparently a lot of interaction took place between the Indian subcontinent and the wider Islamicate world, especially Persia and the Arabic west. In the case of 'Sindbad' he surmises the influence of the story of 'Sanudasa the merchant', a Sanskrit cycle of travel and love of the fourth century. In the case of the romances, however, he rather sees the reworking of Arabic material, combined with elements taken from Persian love romances and local folklore.

This analysis does not seem very satisfactory. First, we need a much stronger and more precise historical framework to prove and reconstruct the transmission of narrative material, for instance by presupposing a cultural and intellectual exchange in the wake of the expedition of Timur Lang, in the fifteenth century, or by the intensification of trade contacts in Mamluk times or the migration of Sufi brotherhoods. Second, although influence from Persian sources is probable, particularly with regard to the *masnavi* form of the romances and the name 'Janshah' in the Arabic story, there are no direct Persian models extant for these specific stories. It seems too easy to suppose a 'Persian link' in the transmission of this material, if it cannot be determined what this link consisted of more precisely. Still, the possibility of a Persian link looks promising and has the merit of placing the process of transmission in a wider context. In an article about the Asian traditions of 'Sayf al-Muluk', Christopher Shackle complains that stories of this type in Asian languages are too readily ascribed to the *Thousand and one nights* as a kind of universal source of narrative material. He points out that the Sayf al-Muluk tradition goes back a long time before the story was incorporated into the *Nights* and defines it as a typically Persian romance. However, the various manuscripts to which he refers all date back to the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries, so whereas they could be a source for the Arabic version in the *Thousand and one nights*, they are too late to have served as a model for 'Mirigavati'. Of course, it is possible that Persian versions that have not been preserved circulated in India at an earlier date. The earliest texts that Shackle mentions are a Chagatay version from the sixteenth cen-

tury, by the poet Meclisi/Majlisī, and an Urdu version by the Golconda poet Ghawwās datable to 1625. Both are *mathnawī* poems.

Whereas apparently the evidence for the Persian tradition of 'Sayf al-Muluk' is of a rather late date, the Chagatay reworking of the story points to a Turkish component in the development of this kind of narrative material. This is confirmed by the occurrence of the motif of the bird-girl and the Cyclops-figure in the Turkish epic *Dede Korkut*. Delio Proverbio has discovered manuscripts of 'Sayf' dated as far back as the fourteenth, perhaps even the thirteenth century in Ottoman Turkish, in addition to a *mathnawī* version by Luṭfī from 1456. The latter text was part of a collection called *Fereç baʿd eş-Šidde* that originated in the second half of the fourteenth century. Remarkably, an Ottoman version of a work with the same title was the origin of the first versions of the story in Europe, through the publication of French translations by Pétis de la Croix (1710–1712) and especially Comte de Caylus (1743). There is also an Ottoman translation of the story of 'Janshah' that dates back to 1429, incorporated in the cycle of the 'Queen of the Serpents'.[12] The manuscripts referred to above give evidence of a rich narrative tradition in which Persian, Turkish, Urdu, and Indian literatures intertwined, and which ultimately spread to Europe.

If we go back to our three main stories, some indications can perhaps be derived from the differences within the texts themselves. Is there internal evidence to suggest that one of the stories is the oldest version that has served as a model for the others? If we compare the narrative form and structure of the stories, the first impression is that the Indian romances are much more accomplished as literary works. They are more elaborated, more consistent, and more sophisticated than their Arabic counterparts. What is lacking in the Arabic stories is particularly an overall cultural-literary concept, unifying meaning and form, which is represented in the Indian romances as *rasa*. It may be that the Arabic stories were a more primitive version and that the idea of *rasa* was added by the Indian poet, to secure the allegorical meaning of the narrative, but it may also be that the Arabic author chose to eliminate it as an alien element. He may even have missed the implicit Sufi message of the romance, merely using its material to compile a new story with a more explicit esoteric dimension.

The omission of the concept of *rasa* affects the narrative consistency of the story of 'Janshah'. After all, in 'Janshah' it is not explained why Shamsa, after her union with Janshah, leaves him to go back to her parents. The reader has to guess that it is probably because of her fickle nature as a jinn, or because

12 Fleischer, *Kleinere Schriften*.

she refuses to comply with his forceful way of capturing her. In 'Mirigavati' this reaction is made explicit by Mirigavati herself, who says that his capturing her by force is incompatible with the principle of *rasa*, which is the only true basis of love, and, of course, of harmony with the Divine. Thus it would seem that the Arabic author left a narrative gap in the story by cutting the *rasa*-element and refusing to find a way to restore the consistency of the story. On the other hand, the motif of the two wives of Raj Kunvar is from a narrative perspective not very conveniently solved. It may be that the two princesses represent worldly and divine interests, but it would appear that it is more elegantly solved in 'Sayf' by introducing a, perhaps too convenient, second suitor. This is also the solution chosen by Manjhan in his 'Madhumalati'.

Now what do these stories, and the connections between them, tell us about discourses of kingship? First, their obvious relationship reveals that they pertain to a single cultural realm, which contains elements from the Indian, Persian, Arabic, and Turkish traditions. This suggests the existence of a common cultural substratum, founded on narrative texts, on which visions of kingship and authority were built. This realm was not static, of course, since it was upheld by infrastructures of exchange, trade, migration, military campaigns, and written texts. Second, within this realm we find differentiations, in taste, style, concepts, and interpretations. Whereas in some cases literary texts are 'officially' translated, more generally they were deconstructed and reconstituted in other ways, serving the tastes and inclinations of their new environments. It is especially in this fluidity and changeability that the role of literature as expression of the collective imagination comes to the fore. And within these processes of transmission and proliferation, love stories assume a prominent, perhaps even the most prominent, role.

If we look at the formal aspects of the romances analysed above, we find that, like the romances of chivalry, they are structured mainly by the 'adventure trope'. The prince reaches a marriageable age, falls in love, and sets out on a journey to find his beloved, conquering all kinds of obstacles on the way. After he has won the heart of his princess, he is legally married to her and returns to his home palace to succeed his father as king. The pattern resembles that of the chivalric romance: the king reaches old age and the dynasty is in danger of coming to an end; the prince goes out into the world to be initiated into the vicissitudes of life and, of course, the entanglements of love, and returns as an adult man, versed in life's perfidy, acknowledged as a hero, and provided with 'booty' in the form of a lovely spouse. This rather rigid pattern indicates that the prince and the other characters do not have much space to act freely, but just have to perform their prescribed roles. They are flat, emblematic, characters, created only to perpetuate the dynastic cycle as is predestined by fate.

This outline of a rather schematic narrative structure suggests that these stories have limited potential of interpretive interest. The element that provides them with narrative possibilities is, of course, the theme of love. Love not only adds a dramatic plot to the story, creating narrative tension, deferral, and a structural and metaphorical matrix; it also builds inside the story the 'feminine' paradox of interruption—through the dangers of passion—and the necessity of procreation—through sexuality. The element of love, which is unpredictable and difficult to control, requires a breaking up of the cycle of dynastic power, a liminal period of quest and adventure, in order to bring about a restoration of the previous equilibrium. This pattern is imposed by fate, but it is also linked to a specific person, whose love is directed at another specific individual, thereby linking the collective destiny of the community to the destiny of a specific individual, legitimizing his claims to power and kingship in the end. The pattern prescribes this alternation with socially pre-established roles and periods of interruption and individual growth to achieve harmony when the desire of the prince for his beloved is stilled and contained within the framework of law, social conventions, and dynastic interests.

Just like war, the theme of love enables the narrator to instil all kinds of moral capacities in his characters. The hero is courageous, smart, inventive, just, gallant, compassionate, etc., while the heroine is chaste, obedient, convinced of her passion, beautiful, sophisticated, and resourceful. But unlike the theme of war, love creates space within the narrative to include all kinds of aesthetic and imaginative elements in the story, because love is connected with beauty, sophistication, emotions, happiness and grief, idyllic environments, wonder, intoxication, eroticism, delicacy, tenderness, enchantment, etc., allowing the narrator to imbue the story with a vast array of symbolic and imagined references related to the liminal state of passion. This is not merely intended to embellish the story, of course; it is also part of the education and personality of the prince, who should incorporate these aesthetic values and sensibilities in his performance of kingship. In the various stories this dimension is incorporated in different ways, as the concept of *rasa* or as the experience of wondrous, labyrinthine worlds.

The love romance thus consists essentially of a basic pattern that allows for the insertion of an element of contingency and narrative liminality, which produces the dialogical complexity of the discourse of kingship, as constituted by the confrontation between feminine and masculine elements. Often, in stories of this kind, there are advisers, too, who act as intermediaries between the conventions and the swerving prince. As we will see presently, similar patterns can be found in European narratives of kingship and love.

The Enchantment of Love: European Fantasies of Kingship and Love

When Cervantes in his *Don Quijote* predicted the demise of the chivalric romance and fostered the taste of realism in literature, he aimed not at the old chivalric cycles, but at the revival of romances in Europe in his time. After the era of the great medieval cycles had come to a close, interest in romances of chivalry revived at the end of the fifteenth century and the beginning of the sixteenth, especially through the popularity of the cycles of *Amadis de Gaule* and, somewhat later, *Palmerin de Oliva*. Spain, in particular, became the cradle of new adventure stories, perhaps under the influence of the important romances of *Cifar* (late thirteenth century) and *Tirant*. The revival of interest coincided with a renewed popularity of the practice of chivalry, probably engendered by the military events of the period, particularly the conquest of Constantinople by the Turks in 1453 and the conquest of Granada by the Spanish kings in 1492. The chivalrous ideal was invested with a new 'ennobling spirit', a new conception of love, 'embodying the protest of a more moral and religious age against the frenzied or adulterous passion of the Celtic stories. [...] Love is depicted as a lasting adoration; the adored one—and, through her, woman in general—is idealized and made the centre of a new social order, devoted to the service of womanhood.'[13]

In the neo-chivalric romances the emphasis was laid on love-intrigues rather than on martial values and the moral impact of the struggle against the infidels. This latter element did not disappear, however, and also the basic adventure pattern was retained. In general, the stories are quite schematic, involving an avalanche of characters all involved with each other through family or love ties, abducted ladies, struggles against giants, misunderstandings, miraculous escapes, and endless journeys across the Mediterranean, from Spain to Constantinople, to Egypt, to Cyprus, to England, and back. Supernatural forces hide everywhere to make ships drift off their intended course or otherwise change the destinies of the heroes. In the end, all characters destined for each other are married, not only to close one episode of the cycle, but also to produce sons and daughters for the next episode in which the adventures are more or less repeated.

Stories of this kind were immensely popular throughout Europe and were translated into the main European languages and usually also adapted to local tastes. They were read and praised first of all at the European courts, but

13 Henry Thomas, *Spanish and Portuguese Romances of Chivalry* (Cambridge etc., 1920) 49.

evidence suggests that the common people relished them as well. They were also frowned upon, however, for their promulgation of a rather gratuitous spirit of adventure and their erotic licentiousness. Contemporary critics called them the 'ulcer of the bookshelves' and 'books that corrupt chastity'. Such books, which 'destroy the young', should 'be consigned to the flames, or banished to Sicily, where men are used to wasting themselves in continual watch and ward against the nightly marauder and the matrimonial bandit.'[14] They were considered a 'develish art, written by Mohammedans', who were 'experts in black magic' and spread poison through pleasant stories.[15]

The neo-chivalric romances thrive on an explicit insertion of exoticism, in the geographical sense—the Eastern parts of the Mediterranean—as well as in the sense of including all kinds of magical interventions to lead the heroes astray or to help them achieve their aims. As in the so-called Popular Books, such as *Fortunatus*, the *Pierre de Provence* novels and others, the Orient contains a fascination that is exploited to complicate the hunt for the beloved. A good example of the tendencies in this period is Margaret Tyler's *Mirror of princely deeds and knighthood*, which appeared in 1578. The work was a translation and reworking of a Spanish original, but it was adapted to the English—Protestant—taste. The story is about Trebatio, the mighty king of Constantinople, who, on hearsay, falls in love with the daughter of the king of Hungary, Brianca. She has been promised to the English Prince Edward, however, so that Trebatio has to kill Edward and impersonate him to seduce Brianca. He begets two sons by her. Subsequently, and rather strangely, Trebatio is magically led to an enchanted castle on a Mediterranean island, where he indulges in passionate pleasures with a mysterious princess. The actual story is about the adventures of his two sons, until he is 'rescued' from his enchantment twenty years later.

The narrative consists of a familiar sequence of plots and motifs, ranging from abduction, miraculous turns, magic boats, talismans, tournaments, ladies in distress, misunderstandings, martial exploits, pagans and Persians, hairy giants, soothsayers, pirates, shipwreck, cross-cultural encounters, and, finally, reunions and re-separations. More interesting perhaps than the story itself is the circumstance that the work was translated and adapted by a woman, and not as usually by a, mostly anonymous, man. Narratives of this kind were generally deemed more harmful to women than to men, since they might inspire chambermaids to set out as a 'lady errant'. Interesting, too, are the

14 Ibid., 228–229.

15 Ibid., 231.

adaptations made to render the text more palatable for the English readers. The main interventions are meant to suppress the many marvellous instances, which were associated with the exuberant imagination of Catholicism. The *Mirror* reflects a 'deep suspicion of the marvellous that is consonant with the Protestant poetics conveyed in anti-Papist texts and in the romances of her Reformed contemporaries.'[16] Papists were accused of being engaged in 'conjurations, magical artes, false miracles, lying wonders, deceivable sines, malitious devises.'[17] To counter this evil, Tyler replaced the word 'marvel' and cut out most references to supernatural phenomena. Still, some 'marvellous' elements were maintained, such as the enchanted castle and the giants representing the uncivilized barbarians. A certain admiration for the 'Saracen' Other is preserved from the Spanish original, based on a universal conception of chivalric values, although conversion is obligatory to restore a form of moral harmony.

One of the interesting aspects of the *Mirror* is that it links the indigenous, English, tradition of knighthood with the great centre of Christian authority, Constantinople, a polarity also found in *Tirant lo Blanc*. In another example of the neo-chivalric revival in the sixteenth century we can see how this kind of exoticism is used not so much to describe an encounter between components of a single realm, or with a common Other, but rather to project moral/political issues into a foreign environment. This text is especially interesting for our discussion since it is rather ambiguous generically: It is a mixture between a mirror for princes and a romance of chivalry. It combines an examination of love with a search for the principles of rulership. Such ambiguity allows Barnaby Riche's *The adventures of Brusanus, prince of Hungaria*, printed in 1592, to convey the literary conventions of its time, but the work also stands out for its innovative methods. As a result of its narrative hybridity, combining diverse elements, it introduces some techniques that herald future conventions in European literature, such as internal contemplation. In spite of its rather unbalanced complexity, it enjoyed considerable success among the contemporary audience.

The story of *Brusanus* is situated in the time of Libernis, the king of Constantinople, ruling over Cairo, Syria, Calipha (Baghdad?), and Greece, 'in the most Christian and Catholic faith'.[18] King Myletto of Hungaria has a son named

16 Margaret Tyler, *Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, Joyce Boro, ed., MHRA Tudor and Stuart Translations, vol. 11 (London, 2014) 'Introduction', 6.

17 Ibid., 10.

18 Barnabe Riche, *The Adventures of Brusanus, Prince of Hungaria* (*1592*), Joseph Khoury, ed. (Toronto, 2014) 127.

Brusanus and a daughter named Leonida. Brusanus is handsome and well built, but voluptuous and full of 'wantonness, licentiousness, wilfulness and wickedness': 'neither the fear of God, the displeasure of his parents, the sundry admonitions of his careful and loving friends, nor the regard of his own honour could make him desist or drive him from his detestable kind of life.'[19] He indulges in gambling, swearing, swashing, masking, mumming, dancing, banqueting, and boozing. His father, worried, cuts his allowance and exhorts him to mend his ways. After all, one day he will be a king, and such an illustrious position requires virtue and honour. A king should enrich his subjects, spare the honour of women, let himself be admonished, be loved by the people, trust his subjects, keep taxes low, have recourse to his subjects in war, be honoured during his life, strive for the welfare of the community, account for himself, and be disciplined as an example to others. Common wisdom says: 'A cruel prince will make a slaughterhouse of his commonwealth, a whoremaster will make it a stews; a prodigal will suck the marrow of his subjects to glut some half-dozen flattering parasites that will be about his person disguised in the habit of fidelity.'[20]

However, after this clear warning, the situation deteriorates, and the king prohibits all loans and gifts to his son. The friends who had partaken in his squandering now forsake him. His mistress, in particular, refuses to help him, and Brusanus, disillusioned, damns all women and sex. In order to pursue virtue, he sets out on an 'educational' journey. In Epirus, the neighbouring empire, King Leonarchus is loved and respected, because of his 'justice, liberality, mediocrity, peaceable government, gravity and authority'.[21] However, since he is roaming the kingdom to inspect the conditions of the subjects, dressed as a merchant, he has been missing for some time, and the people ask his noble son Dorestus to ascend the throne. Brusanus, also incognito, joins the king and two others go to the court to complain about a case of corruption. Dorestus hears the case and judges 'with mediocrity that neither we lean to over much severity, nor yet may be led by too much lenity'.[22]

After Brusanus and Dorestus have become friends, the latter summarizes the principles of good government: 'The office of a good prince is to defend the commonwealth, to help the innocent, to aid the simple, to correct the offender, to relieve the poor, to honour the virtuous, to punish the vicious, to bridle the

19 Ibid., 128.
20 Ibid., 131.
21 Ibid., 142.
22 Ibid., 162.

ambitious, and by justice give every one his own.'[23] Now Leonarchus throws off his disguise and reports about the situation of the kingdom, which is full of vices, as he has witnessed with his own eyes: Men are idle and not well occupied; usury, extortion, and hoarding are widespread, people are subject to pride and ambition, and practice simony. Oppression, malice, and lack of love reign everywhere.

After celebrations and a tournament in which Brusanus distinguishes himself, using the sign *Invidia amoris*, or 'Hatred of love', Brusanus and Dorestus travel together to Illyria, which is ruled by the cruel tyrant Astulpho. Now an intricate love-intrigue ensues: Dorestus falls in love with Astulpho's daughter Moderna, who, however, becomes enamoured of Brusanus. A dispute between the two princes follows, in which Brusanus warns his friend against the pitfalls of love: 'His associates and chiefest companions are pain, travail, anger, rage, fury, doubt, grief, languish, threatening despair, uncertain hope; his surest good a certain base weakness; his truth are labour, some adventures, nay, rather loathsome misadventures, which either will bring forth ill success or no success.'[24] Dorestus is not convinced, however, and, spurred on by his passion, he retorts:

> Love is a god and will be obeyed, and looks to command, not to be conquered; and beauty cannot be resisted. Dare reason abide the brunt where beauty bids the battle? Can wisdom win the field where love commands as captain? O no, no! Love is without law and therefore above all law; honoured in heaven, feared in earth, and a very terror to infernal ghosts.[25]

In his bitterness, Brusanus describes love as lewd, lascivious, beastly, and odious, and as a 'loadstone to ruth and ruin'.[26] Beauty can be dangerous, as in a tiger or a snake.

Dorestus does not share Brusanus's aversion to women: 'I cannot so lightly be induced to mislike of that sex of whom I was born, of whom I received life, by whom I have been nursed and charily brought up. And women are framed of nature with as great perfectness of the mind for the exercise of virtue as man.'[27] And he adds:

---

23 Ibid., 174.
24 Ibid., 199.
25 Ibid., 200.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 203.

> Had not nature adorned them with perfection of beauty, delicacy of body, excellency of wit, and such sweetness in all their demeanours that men of any judgement and able to discern of such inestimable riches, do they not whet their wits, their wills, their tongues and all their whole inventions how to comprehend their favour and insinuate themselves into their grace?[28]

In the meantime, Dorestus reveals his love to Moderna, who rejects him, however, in spite of her father's insistence that she marry him.

Moderna, in turn approaches Brusanus, who, to her grief, turns her down with the spiteful words: 'Madam, when dogs fall to snarling, serpents to hissing, and women to weeping, the one means to bite, the other to sting, and the third to deceive. […] I have no leisure to love, I must about other business.'[29] This is not the end of the affair, however; the dispute continues in the erudite references to the opinions on women of the ancient philosophers Marcus Aurelius, Seneca, Diogenes, Plutarchus, Protogenes, Plato, Pythagoras, Aristotle, Socrates, Chilon, and Tertullian. Brusanus argues that love turns a wise man into a fool, a religious man into an idolater, an honoured man into a scorned man; it makes a careful man negligent, a valiant man weak, a provident man careless, a young man withered, a rich man poor, and a patient man revengeful. These exchanges about the nature of women and love gradually persuade Brusanus that his reluctance to love is erroneous, and Brusanus and Moderna, rather abruptly, decide to elope together, leaving Dorestus 'in a brown study',[30] that is, in despair.

The couple escape to Greece and from there to Calipha, where they are cruelly separated by fate, and Brusanus becomes involved in treacherous palace intrigues. These intrigues are added to the trail of anger and resentfulness that Brusanus has left behind, and that causes several kings and princes to mobilize their troops and attack each other to rectify the abuses of the prince. In the turmoil Brusanus shows himself a courageous, just, and clever warrior, defeating the evildoers, unravelling vicious schemes, gallantly defending ladies, and supporting the righteous kings. In the end he is reunited with Moderna. Dorestus, however, is still immersed in bitterness: 'Then he called to his mind how Moderna had despised him, and here he began with disdainful imaginations to condemn all women of instability, of inconsistency, of lightness, of uncertainty,

28 Ibid., 205.

29 Ibid., 229.

30 Ibid., 244.

and to accuse them as creatures that were vowed to all manner of vanity.'[31] Fortunately, he falls in love with Leonida, Brusanus's sister. After the marriages have taken place, Dorestus says with relief: 'O Brusanus, I can but rejoice to think that the enemy to all woman-kind is yet at length become a sworn soldier in the band of Cupid and contented to march under the banner of Venus. I hope by this time you have renounced all your former heresies.'[32]

In this summary we can easily discover some basic pattern, springing from an intrigue linked to the interruption of the dynastic succession and the intervention of a treacherous concubine. We encounter familiar tropes, such as the parallel figure of the friend/rival, the prevailing of love, and the sequence of comic intrigues leading to a final denouement. We see the hero crossing a cultural boundary and entering a wasps' nest of conspiracies, honest ladies supporting trustworthy men, the hero protecting ladies in distress, the intervention of fate in the guise of brigands, etc. Still, in spite of this schematic structure, the story is not completely emblematic. This is due, first, to the development of the hero, who completes a process of psychological maturation, and, second, because of the explicit contemplations about statesmanship and love, and, more significantly, about the connection between the two. This interpretive potential is made possible by the generic ambiguity of the narrative, combining a love adventure with components of a mirror-for-princes type.

The trajectory of Brusanus is made more charged as a result of some ironies built into the dialogical structure of the story. At first, Brusanus is deaf to the good advice of his father and gives up his wanton life only when he is forced to do so. When he is confronted with true love, he is deaf to the arguments of Dorestus, who experiences the power of love. In the end Dorestus convinces Brusanus of the positive side of love to his own detriment, and later it is Brusanus who has difficulty in persuading Dorestus to give up his misogyny. As in other texts, the story is based on a dialogical situation, which is—almost—two-sided and which succeeds in producing harmony. The dialogic situation is found, too, in the episode at the court of Leonarchus, where ideas are exchanged about proper rulership. All these considerations become pertinent only when they leave the realm of words and penetrate into the realm of experience.

In order to abandon his obtuseness, Brusanus has to experience love and be confronted with the abuse of power. He has not only to be initiated; he must prove as well that he is a worthy prince ready to stand up against injustice

31 Ibid., 296.

32 Ibid., 325.

and oppression. Only when he has completed this trajectory, when he has internalized the values of the good prince, has he sufficiently matured to occupy the throne. This is not only an initiation into the art of statecraft; it is also a process of personal growth, since Brusanus has to forsake his former manners and learn to behave according to moral standards. First of all, he has to contain his lust, not by excluding women from his life, but by finding the balance between love and lust. As the prince of Calipha rightly observes: 'The greatest conquerors be they that can conquer themselves, and honour is soonest ministered to him which can manage his own affections.'[33]

As remarked above, the discursive complexity of *Brusanus* is integrated into its form. It contains letters and personal reflections that break the sequence of events and insert 'dialogues' that postpone the actual story. The dialogues create different levels within the story, to the effect that the story is not just propelled by a series of subsequent events, but that part of the narrative dynamic is produced by contemplation and psychological transformation. They create a space within the story in which events can be seen from a different perspective, enabling a change of the interpretation of these events within the narrative context. The growth to kingship does not consist of a rather mechanical process of collecting experiences, showing capabilities, and conquering a beloved; it is also a process of inner growth and deliberation, combining experience with abstract principles. As in other stories, it is the many sides of love and sexuality, and their embeddedness in culture and society, that are the catalysts instigating the dialogue and the events that in the end together reveal the true nature of kingship.

This still rather tentative narrative complexity will remain significant in European literature, especially during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when writers were almost permanently struggling and experimenting with literary form. These experiments were induced partly by the necessity to deal with a new political environment in which the unbound imagination of the romances collided with political realities in its preferred realm, the Eastern Mediterranean. The fantastic nature of the romances was systematically associated with the Orient—by Cervantes and others—creating a discursive break in what seemed to be the essence of fiction—the imagination—and the reality of cultural and political boundaries. If the Orient as a source of literary inspiration could not be excluded, at least it necessitated a redefinition of its purport. What is more, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the Orient was no longer the domain of unrestrained fantasies; it became a place as

33 Ibid., 283.

'real' as Europe itself, a source of knowledge and wisdom, and part of the same scientific reality that Europe identified with. Thus, while reality became more homogeneous, it became more complex, too, and the straightforward narratives of the sixteenth century were insufficient to cope with the new visions of the world that imposed themselves.

There are several texts that exemplify this process. Here we will confine ourselves to discussing one example, showing how the Orient still served as a narrative focus and textual complexity heralded the novelistic form: Madame de Lafayette's novel *Zaïde*, which appeared in 1671. The novel clearly shows some lingering characteristics of the chivalric romance, which has now developed into what is usually called a *histoire galante*, a love story combined with elements of adventure. Like the earlier romances, the *histoires galantes* are also constructed around the cultural-political boundary between Christianity and Islam, more specifically the Ottoman Turks. However, they mark the transition from emblematic to increasingly personal stories focused more on individual experiences and psychological inquiry, at least in some of the representative works. The heroes and heroines are no longer mere vehicles for a schematic story; they carry their personal dilemmas and are responsible for their acts. This development became more pronounced in the literature of the eighteenth century.

The story of *Zaïde* seems to be a response to the momentous fall of Granada under the attacks of the Catholic kings in 1492. It is set, however, in the kingdom of Leon in the ninth or tenth century, when the outcome of the struggle against the Muslims was still undecided. One of the innovative aspects of the novel, adding to its narrative complexity, is that it begins *in medias res*, with Consalve, the handsome and trustworthy son of a Castilian count, leaving the royal court of Leon and joining Alphonse, the son of a prestigious Navarrese family who has retired in a small cottage on the Mediterranean coast. Hoping to find solitude, Consalve's peace of mind is disturbed when a small boat is thrown up on the shore, depositing a lady of exquisite beauty, clad in a lovely, though somewhat exotic, garments and accompanied by a servant. Consalve tries to speak to her to find out who she is, using Spanish, Italian, and Arabic, but she seems to know none of these languages, although she has Moorish features.

In an interruption of the main story, Consalve now confides his identity to Alphonse and explains what made him flee his distinguished home. His father is one of the most powerful counts, whose might is feared even by the king. Consalve was befriended by Crown Prince Don Garcie. He fell in love with one of the court ladies, Nugna Bella, but the king cannot endorse a marriage between them, because this would imply a union between the two mightiest families of the kingdom. What is more, Don Garcie expresses his interest in Consalve's

sister, which leads to enmity between the two friends, since Consalve is suspicious of the prince's intentions. In the meantime, political intrigues result in Consalve's father's estrangement from the king, while Consalve discovers that his beloved and his friends have betrayed him to further their personal ambitions. Disillusioned, he is dismissed from the court and decides to retire anonymously from public life. Moreover, his devastating experience with the deceitful Nugna Bella has convinced him that he will never love a woman again.

However, the encounter with the exotic lady on the beach has revived his sensibilities, and soon he is irresistibly in love with her. He suspects that he makes her sad because he resembles her lost lover, and he tries to find out her prehistory. Just when he is learning Greek because he surmises that that is her mother tongue, she and her servant are suddenly led into a boat by some strange men and taken away. Convinced that he will never meet her again, he considers leaving Spain and joining the Emperor of Constantinople in his struggle against the Saracens. However, later their paths cross twice, once when he hears only her voice and once when he sees her from afar. After Alphonse has recounted his life story, an account dominated by his pathological jealousy, which destroyed a seemingly ideal love-match, Consalve is traced by his former servant, who takes him back to the royal court.

The second part of the novel is set at the royal court amid its entourage, where Don Garcie has now become king. He explains to Consalve what has happened: with the support of Consalve's father Don Garcie gathered troops to force the king to resign. With the support of the counts he acceded to the throne and married Consalve's sister. Now they want to reconcile with him and give him a position in the army to fight the Moors. Consalve accepts, but his mood remains clouded because he misses his beloved. As luck would have it, when a town is captured from the Moors, Consalve visits a castle where a group of Moorish ladies is held captive and he finds his beloved, Zaïde, among them. They can now communicate, since she has learned Spanish and he can speak Greek. Coincidentally, Consalve severely wounds a Moorish prince called Alamir, who turns out to be Zaïde's suitor, who is a nephew of the 'Calife Osman' and who aims to marry her with the support of her father Zuléma, the commander of the Moorish army. Zaïde has refused, however. Her servant Félime tells Consalve about their adventures that ended with shipwreck on the Catalan coast. Finally, Zuléma and the Moorish army are defeated by Don Garcie and Consalve and a peace treaty is signed.

The various misunderstandings and intrigues are now quickly resolved, since communication can finally be established. Alamir appears to be a scoundrel, albeit not without a tragic side; he is spurned by Zaïde and dies of the

wounds inflicted by Consalve. Félime, after telling Consalve Zaïde's life story, dies out of grief for Alamir. Zaïde discovers that a medallion in her possession showing the portrait of an Arab prince is in fact a representation of Consalve in Moorish attire. Once, when she and her father were in Alexandria, a soothsayer foretold that this portrait was of the prince whom she would marry. This is the reason why the sight of Consalve had distressed her so: the resemblance was clear, but she was convinced that he, being a Christian, could never marry her. It turns out that Zaïde's Greek grandmother was a sister of Consalve's father. After Zuléma, Zaïde's father, has converted to the Christian faith there remain no more obstacles to a happy ending: the marriage of Consalvo with Zaïde.

Although the basic pattern of the story seems simple and schematic at first sight, there are several aspects that differentiate it from the earlier romances. We find some familiar tropes, such as peregrinations on the Mediterranean, storm, and shipwreck, duels, abduction, etc. We also find the key interests of the romance genre, the prominent place of religion, the preponderance of social conventions, and the effort of individual heroes to reconcile these conventions with their inner urges and individuality, in the form of love. Finally, as said above, we find the convergence of cultural and political boundaries, which are porous and strict at the same time, symbolizing impermeability but in fact allowing communication and exchange, due to the contingencies of war, the sea, storms, and love. Other characteristics of the romance are absent, such as tournaments, the codes of knighthood, and, especially, supernatural interventions. Of course, the prediction by the Alexandrian soothsayer plays a decisive role in the plot, but it is defined rather as a coincidence than as a case of real clairvoyance.

A main difference between *Zaïde* and the romance genre is the novel's form. The story is not constructed as a straightforward account, but as a kind of frame story, consisting of a main line and inserted stories that explain the causes and occasions that resulted in the situation at hand. Consalve's story, Alphonse's story, Don Garcie's story, Félime's stories about Zaïde and Alamir are all incorporated as separate tales that carry the clues to help us understand the narrative as a whole, gradually adding new information to enable the reader to unravel the plot without losing suspense. This narrative layer is supplemented with other textual elements, such as letters. The inserted stories are not only meant to postpone and temporally arrange the components of the plot; they also have a significance in themselves, especially as examples of various forms of love, Consalve's tragic, self-sacrificial love, Don Garcie's pragmatic love, Alphonse's jealous love, Alamir's combination of opportunistic and true love, and Zaïde's all-embracing, romantic love. Every form of love has its

psychological complications, either because the intentions of the lover thwart 'true' love, or because manipulations and circumstances create impediments and passion has to be mentally reconfigured.

The labyrinthine structure of the story coincides with the mental and physical state of the main protagonists. After his setbacks in Leon, Consalve enters a liminal phase, marked by his leaving the town and ending up in an isolated cottage, and even considering setting out on a desperate journey to the East. He is detached from his surroundings and emotionally broken, and therefore susceptible to events and impressions that will transform him and his life. Similarly, Zaïde is adrift, too, roaming the seas with her father, who has forfeited the caliphal throne and is pushed to the margins of power, ending up in a long battle against the infidels in Spain. Zaïde herself is, on the one hand, entangled in the structure of hierarchy and social conventions imposed by her society, but she is also wilful and autonomous, because she believes in her intuition and feelings. True love should overcome her loneliness and 'captivity', but before this can be achieved, she has to be shorn loose by fate and thrown into the chaotic phase that severs the ties with her surroundings, governed by authority, prohibitions, and conventions.

The liminal phases in which Zaïde and Consalve find themselves are required to make their meeting possible. The only way in which they can cross the seemingly impermeable boundaries and can escape the authority structuring them is by escaping the forces governing their lives, either by conceding to despair or by accepting the uncertain whims of fate. And the only way to reach this state and to enter this phase of uncertainty is to believe in the power of true love. Only this belief can efface the boundaries and restrictions imposed on their love and allow them to enter a no-man's land in which political and cultural barriers are temporarily suspended. It is, simultaneously, a psychological no-man's land, which requires contemplation and investigation before some order can be re-established: the protagonists have to be initiated into the various manifestations of love and have to establish a way to communicate. Only then can a psychological condition be realized that makes a harmonious union possible.

The complex structure of the novel is used, too, to highlight one of the main themes of the novel, which dominates the lives of the protagonists: the difficulty of communicating, of mutual understanding and of grasping the real nature of the situation behind its appearances. Thus, the inserted stories emphasize that the characters have evaluated their situation incorrectly, because they had insufficient information or interpreted the information that they had incorrectly. Like the reader, the characters have to gradually discover the story in which they are staged. Consalve is in permanent search to find

out what is happening to him, not only his feelings for Zaïde, but also the schemes of his friends at the royal court. His investigations are hampered by a persistent miscommunication and the inability to find communicative means: he discovers the betrayal of Nugna Bella only through a misdirected letter; he lacks a common language to speak with Zaïde; he is unaware that he is fighting with Prince Alamir, his rival in love; and, finally, he is unfamiliar with the true nature of love.

The story depicts Consalve's confusion as a juxtaposition of various discursive domains, which both Zaïde and Consalve have to explore, but which seem never to match. The first discursive domain is, of course, language, which proves to be an unsurmountable obstacle when Zaïde and Consalve first meet. Since they have no common language, they are both not merely condemned to silence, but actually mute and unable to communicate even the minutest information about themselves, let alone their visions of love and destiny. Second, the two are separated by the discursive boundaries between men and women, reflecting not only diverse social environments, but also predisposed attitudes towards love and the discourses in which they are caught. Third, Consalve attempts to open up a common domain by depicting their situation, as he envisions it, in a painting, which should bridge the gap of their linguistic incompatibility. This fails, however, because he is unable to formulate a common interpretation of what is shown. Conversely, Zaïde has a mysterious medallion with the portrait of an Arab prince, whose meaning she is unable to convey. Fourth, both Zaïde and Consalve are restricted by their cultural backgrounds. Zaïde has all the outward characteristics of an Oriental lady, beautiful but mysterious, unreachable and exotic. At the same time, she is within Consalve's cultural 'domain', displaced and intruding as a discursive 'alien'.

In all these domains the discursive incongruities between Zaïde and Consalve have to be harmonized in one way or another. This seems to be what the story is about, as is suggested by both its form and the efforts of the protagonists: the boundaries preventing communication and a common understanding have to be overcome, and this can be done only by establishing channels within all these domains. It is no coincidence that the key to the solution of Zaïde and Consalve's predicament is the medallion with the portrait. The portrait is in the end interpreted by using their common languages, Spanish and Greek; it explains the nature of Zaïde's love, based on a prediction; by being identified as representing Consalve, it solves the problem of visual interpretation; by explaining the incorrect identification by pointing at Consalve's Moorish dress, attention is directed at the possibilities of cross-cultural identification and communication. The medallion symbolizes the possibility of communication, as a common 'medium' enabling the trajectories of the two lovers to cross,

accompanying them on their peregrinations, and, finally, establishing the coveted union. It is the medallion that is, in the end, the instrument of fate.

However, this is not the whole story. All the adventures and struggles of Zaïde and Consalve are structured not only by discursive and cultural incongruities and interactions, but also, and predominantly, by political frameworks. It is no coincidence, of course, that the author chose historical material as the basic stratum of her narrative. The intrigue of the vicissitudes of the protagonists is tightly interwoven with the military and political confrontation between Christianity and Islam, and the ways in which it structures power relations, social structures, and cultural boundaries. The lives and trajectories of the two lovers are steered by their confrontation, and their union coincides with its outcome. The phases of swerving, love exchange, and union are paralleled by the phases of the campaign of Don Garcie against the Moors, his coup d'état, his military expedition, and his final victory. His victory, co-achieved by Consalve, opens up the possibility of a denouement that, inevitably, consists of the triad political truce, conversion, and consent to marriage. The political framework has to be reshaped to allow for a legitimate marriage, but, it can be argued, political harmony is preconditioned by marital relations.

It is in the combination of politics and love that the narrative of kingship in *Zaïde* has to be sought. The adventures of Zaïde and Consalve are not only steered by political circumstances; they are also firmly embedded in relations of power. Consalve, living at the court of Leon, is completely subjected to the forces of power and the intrigues generated by them. He is the victim of the ambitions of his peers and of the prominent position of his father. Because of his integrity, he is crushed by forces he is unable to grasp or influence. His only solution is to withdraw in search of an 'initiation' of another kind, which fits his uncompromising personality. Zaïde, too, is the victim of machinations and power games, implicated in her father's position and—frustrated—ambitions, combined with the restrictions on women imposed on her by a thoroughly patriarchal society. She, too, is crushed because she refuses to accommodate to these forces and upholds her loyalty to her vision of true love. As a woman, she is unable to escape, but fate comes to her rescue and enables her to, at least temporarily, leave her restricted domain.

For Consalve, the liminal phase is ended by the seizure of power by Don Garcie and the revealing of his true intentions. This change makes possible the re-integration of Consalve, in his full integrity, and enriched by the experience of love. His re-integration is completed, of course, only when he is able to call Zaïde his own. In turn, Zaïde is forcefully re-integrated into her milieu, but reaches her destiny only when the oppressive forces are removed by defeat, death, and conversion, which effectuates the crumbling of the power structure

imprisoning her. The whole new configuration is sealed when it turns out that Zaïde and Consalve are distant relatives, smoothing all the potentially disruptive details forever. The interactions between political and personal elements bring about in the end the positive denouement.

It is in the combination of the two levels of the story that the discourse of royal power is rooted. At first sight we find a familiar picture: an emperor in Constantinople—now conveniently marginalized—and a king in Spain, opposed by a caliph and a Moorish king respectively. And both sides have their most prominent knights, who are not, however, bound to the codes of knighthood, but rather follow their own inclinations and designs. Although the king is all-powerful, still authority is composite; as in the romances of chivalry, the hero is not the king, but his fiercest warrior, who, again, personifies the values of the community. These values are here not expressed in martial exploits and campaigns, however; the focus is rather on a struggle of another kind: the hero's efforts to find harmony by removing not only the rivalling knight, but also the obstacles hampering mutual understanding and perpetuating misunderstandings from the past. His contribution to the consolidation of the throne is not so much in defeating the enemy, but rather in conquering a space for communication and discursive exchange, all encompassed by the enormous force of love. The narrative thereby contains the main ingredients of the romance, but the textual complexity and the change of emphasis have turned it into a completely different genre, changing, too, the discursive embedding of royal authority.

Concluding Remarks

It is no exaggeration to say that social structures, hierarchies, and conventions are to a large extent intended to regulate gender relationships and their effects on the coherence of the community. After all, sexual relations tend to have a disruptive influence on rational conceptions of social order and, thereby, the control of social stability. It is no wonder then that gender relations are a crucial component of fictional literature, which serves as a medium to embed social relations in a collective imagination. It is also logical that they play an important role in imaginings of kingship. The main dilemmas posed in fictionalized representations of the connection between gender relations and kingship arise from the fact that love and sexuality may threaten the continuity of the dynasty by potentially breaking social rules and institutions, while at the same time they are indispensable for the continuation of the dynasty. In premodern societies and literatures this tension is usually dealt with by

installing a strong regime of patriarchal power, but this stratagem contributes to the polarization between the sexes and an accumulation of destructive energies. And, to be sure, a balance between male and female elements is conducive to the stability of authority and the charisma of the king.

As we have argued elsewhere,[34] one of the functions of the relations between love and kingship in romances is not only the account of an initiation, but also the visualization of what may be called the 'management of desire'. Desire, in the Freudian sense, is usually depicted as the urge in a prince to find his destiny, that is, his replacing his father as a king, through displaying his powers and conquering his beloved, as proof of his masculinity and as the embodiment of social order. In the patriarchal mind, women are perhaps not without a will of their own, but in the end still more an object than an agent in this process. Nevertheless, by representing a potential threat to a supposedly self-evident order, women are the instigators of narrative explication and dialogic processes. Put bluntly, without women there would be no narrative of kingship, because they necessitate a layered and diversified vision of authority required for producing narratives. Therefore, although all stories discussed in this chapter are fundamentally misogynous and exude a deep fear of women, they also seem to acknowledge that without women kingship makes no sense.

If we confine ourselves to the theme of love, rather than gender relations in general, we find that in spite of its disruptive potential, and in spite of its patriarchal connotations, it is filled with positive values. Love can be seen as a symbolic container of positive physical, psychological, social and, moral properties, imbuing a king and a society with an image of harmony, integrity, and stability. Love is the force making visible the ideal values of a community, legitimizing specific human relationships, and breaking boundaries that seemed impenetrable. As such, it represents the fulfilment of destiny and thereby the legitimation of a specific role. Love, in its confined form as the unleashing and containment of desire, is ultimately the manifestation of fate.

---

34 Van Leeuwen, *The Thousand and One Nights*.

CHAPTER 6

Unrequested Advice

In the previous chapters we have seen that in different types of narrative one of the key elements that to a large extent determined the formal and thematic aspects of the texts is the dialogic situation. Whether formalized within a framing structure or integrated into the distribution of power and responsibility among the various characters, everywhere authority is not monolithic, but constructed with complementary components. The fracturing of the discourse of power is instigated either by necessity, for instance by the intervention of women, or by the institutionalization of authority, for instance by securing the office of prime minister as a counterweight to the symbolic all-powerfulness of the king. The minister or the hero is not just an advisor of the king; he is an integral part of the structure of power, as is nicely shown in the Chinese narratives and the *Hamzanama*. In European narratives this function is less prominent, but here, too, power is never monopolized and always divided between its constituents.

The dilemma of the figure of the vizier is that kings may be inclined to appropriate as much power as possible and refuse to heed the minister's advice. Even worse, ministers may be punished for dissident or displeasing opinions. This potential problem is sometimes compensated for by codes of conduct regulating the communication and relationship between the king and his minister, to prevent encroachments on their respective domains. This is not helpful in all situations, as is shown in the Chinese stories, where it is the minister's duty to warn the emperor against misjudgements, even at the risk of being dismissed or even decapitated. Loyalty is always only partly to the king; more generally it concerns the people, the dynasty, or the institutions of government, and therefore the minister has the duty to intervene when these interests are threatened. Conversely, an emperor may appeal to state interests when he feels the need to discharge or punish disloyal or corrupt ministers to prevent the subversion of his authority and ensure the smooth functioning of government. The Chinese examples show that usually a disturbed relationship between the king and his minister will lead to unrest among the notables and the population, and to a general decline in prosperity. Therefore, the responsibilities of the emperor and the ministers should be well attuned.

In general, systems of power and authority have an inherent tendency to consolidate and reproduce themselves, and to exclude or neutralize, even incorporate, dissident and oppositional forces. In the narratives discussed above,

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_008
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

there are mostly very limited opportunities to channel dissident voices, except through the figure of the minister. There is no ideological basis for incorporating forms of dissent into the system of authority, apart from a general appeal to justice and leniency. Bad government is usually not reformed by rebalancing established and oppositional elements, except perhaps in the case of the mirror-for-princes narratives, but rather by the use of violence, military confrontation, and revolt. But even in these cases the symbolic legitimacy of the king of the dynasty comes first: there are always systems and interests transcending the specific circumstances of a specific king, related to the rationale and principles of the organization of government and power, anchored in history and religion, representing an essence that cannot be separated from the notion of authority.

Because of this need for stability, the narratives we have analysed so far have been rather accommodating to the powers that be. They clearly reflect an interaction between established discourses of power and the popular imagination, and as such they fulfil the discursive function that they are conceived for: the stabilization of the social order and the embedding of power systems and their ideological claims in the collective imagination. The narratives tend to be conservative in the sense that they accentuate values that foster stability and political order, and condemn disorder and instability. Still, a strong sense of justice can be perceived, combined with other, ideological and social, positive values that are a condition for proper government. This desire for justice, which legitimizes revolt, is not ideologically defined and, as said above, is often associated with general historical legitimations. Except perhaps in the case of Hamza, order is restored with an appeal to ancient, traditional, values rather than to a new revolutionary worldview.

Therefore, although dissidents have probably always existed, and although occasionally certain elements that express dissent can be detected in essentially conservative texts, in the texts studied above opposition is at best encapsulated in the texts themselves and not part of the intention of the text as a whole. Texts directly challenging the system of power or indicting the king for overt misrule or discrediting the institution of kingship seem to be rare. This situation begins to change in the later phases of the period under study here, and more commonly in some traditions than in others. In China we find dissident voices in the seventeenth century, which, as we will see, were inspired by forms of Neo-Confucianism and dissatisfaction with the new, foreign, dynasty. In Europe, French and English absolutism provoked new ideas about the position of the king, the power of government, and the relationship between society, the people, and dynastic rule. In the Muslim realm, we find a whole tradition of texts about the principles of government and advice to the

ruler that were not, to be sure, always critical, but still reveal an upsurge in interest in political thought. In the Ottoman Empire the genre of the *nasihatnama*, or 'advisory treatises', flourished in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and from Mughal India we have the famous *j'accuse* of Guru Gobindh Singh against Emperor Aurangzeb, confronting him with his ruthless policy towards the Sikhs.[1]

In this chapter we will discuss a number of texts that show a kind of critical confrontation with the symbol of power, the king or the emperor, in the form of fictional or semi-fictional narratives. It is difficult to speculate about possible common causes for the more or less simultaneous emergence of this trend within different traditions, in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. Undoubtedly there are many factors conducive to critical reflection on political ethics and expressing it in a literary form. In China, India, the Ottoman Empire, and Europe we find what may be called periods of 'enlightened absolutism' under the Ming and Qing dynasties, the Mughal and Ottoman sultans, and the royal houses of Spain, France, England, and Austria. In most cases we perceive despotism connected with intellectual fervour, intensified relations with the outside world, and an interest in literary innovation. These factors were perhaps not the causes for the phenomenon of political critique, but they probably provided the necessary conditions for it to appear. These general circumstances should not, however, obscure the role of courageous individuals who were not afraid to show their independence of mind and voluntarily took upon themselves the role of the minister offering advice to his king, feeling the responsibility to protect him against error, even if their help was not requested and often openly resented and punished.

Apart from parallels and similarities, our survey will also show diverging trends, related to the development of general intellectual trends in Europe and Asia. Whereas in the Muslim realm, for instance, the tradition is marked by the continuation and further evolution of existing generic forms, in Europe we perceive a remarkable inclination to experiment with texts and techniques of narration. As remarked above, in these experiments the Oriental element, as an exotic reference, but also as a source of narrative techniques, was preserved. In the European texts discussed in this chapter this trend is illustrated by, on the one hand, textual complexity and dialogic techniques and, on the other hand, references to Oriental statecraft and the use of pseudo-Oriental perspectives to comment on society, obviously instigated by increasing, direct communication with and knowledge of Oriental societies. The result is a mirroring effect that also affects the portrayal of kings and kingship. Although this is a divergent

1 Guru Gobind Singh, *Zafarnama*, trans. Navtej Sarna (Haryana etc., 2011).

development, it is not wholly strange to the patterns we discerned previously, since it continues the forms of dialogism, narrative strategies, and convergence of statecraft and storytelling. As we have seen in our discussion of *Zaïde* and *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* in Chapters Three and Five, in this chapter, too, we will see that Oriental models retained their central position, especially the *Thousand and one nights* and its cognates.

The Frustrated Official: Mustafa Ali of Gallipoli

From our discussion of the chivalric romance in Chapter Four, the city of Constantinople clearly emerges as one of the world's most important metropoles over a long period of time. In both Christian and Muslim narratives the city was not only of pivotal political and economic significance, but, especially, of symbolic significance, with its old heritage of imperial rule. It was first of all a centre of power, where the symbiosis of religion and politics was articulated. Already in the early years of Islam the Byzantine Emperor had been a formidable foe, who had withstood the Muslim campaigns to conquer the city. As a result of the Crusades and the Muslim encroachments, for Christian Europe Constantinople and the emperor developed into the focal point of symbolic power, which was at the centre of the system of knighthood in Europe and symbolized Europe's resistance to Muslim expansion. When the Ottoman Turks finally subdued the city in 1453, this was seen in Europe not merely as a defeat for Christianity, but as a catastrophe of apocalyptic proportions, which seemed to herald the end of the Christian realm.

The Ottomans were, of course, well aware of the significance of Constantinople when they beleaguered and conquered the city. Their victory represented a historical watershed, seemingly tilting the balance between Muslims and Christians decisively in favour of the former, and realizing one of the historical ambitions of Islam. After this important step they were able to continue their expansion into Syria, Egypt, and North Africa in 1516–1517, creating an empire worthy of its illustrious capital. In a relatively brief period, the Ottomans had grown from a regional power in western Anatolia into the greatest Muslim empire of its time, uniting the Holy Places of Mecca and Medina, the economic centres of Egypt, Syria, Tunis, and Iraq, and the political majesty of Constantinople within a single political and administrative constellation. These conquests turned the Ottoman sultan arguably into the most powerful sovereign on earth, outshining the Habsburg courts in Vienna and Madrid, the Persian Safavids, and the Indian Moghuls, and perhaps equalled only by the emperors in China.

FIGURE 9 *The Emperor of China ploughing the first furrow, Christian Bernard Rode, ca. 1773.*

The sheer grandeur of their newly conquered dominance obliged the Ottomans to formulate a legitimation of their authority within the Muslim realm. This was not so easy, since, like the Mamluk Sultan Baybars before them, they were not the heirs of traditional princely families or royal dynasties rooted in the regions over which they ruled. Moreover, they had no reputation yet for being entwined with the various layers of the religious tradition. Therefore, both in the political and religious spheres, their claims to legitimacy were rather thin. Still, the conquest of Constantinople could be presented as a major victory for Islam, which was related to the aspirations of the religious forebears, as we saw in the romance of Sayyid Battal. And their political stature as rulers could be connected with the great expansionist traditions of Asia, including Chengiz Khan and Timur Lang, and their military, political, and administrative legacies. It was these two pillars on which Ottoman discourses of authority came to rest, Islamic prowess and Central Asian statecraft. The amalgamation of the two was realized by the reforms of Sultan Suleyman the Magnificent (r. 1520–1566), who built an administrative apparatus that survived, in spite of

many upheavals, until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was solidly founded on the combination of secular law, good governance, a sophisticated, relatively modern, bureaucracy, Muslim sovereignty, and the martial heritage of the Asian steppes.

The basic concepts of the Ottoman discourse of power can be found in the extraordinary work of the Ottoman historian, poet, bureaucrat, and scholar Mustafa Ali (1541–1600), who can be seen as a representative of intellectual and political trends in the period after Suleyman. Even during the latter part of Suleyman's reign, the solid administrative organization of the empire began to show flaws, mainly due to negligence, corruption, and nepotism. The signs of decay stimulated officials to give vent to their opinions of the affairs of the state, trying to diagnose the causes of the disease and proposing reforms based on the elementary principles of rulership. This gave rise to the genre of the *nasihatnama*, a kind of voluntary advice for the sultan, resembling the ancient genre of the mirror-for-princes. One of the first works of this kind was written by Mustafa Ali, who, besides his historical works and poetry, wrote a *Counsel for the sultans* in 1581. This text, which contains a survey of the principles of government, interspersed with anecdotes and poetry, was clearly intended not only to improve the functioning of the state, but also to enhance Mustafa Ali's career chances, which had stagnated in a frustrating way.

Of course, works of this type are not self-evidently part of the corpus we have selected for our investigation here, since they are not part of a popular tradition, but rather provide a courtly perspective. However, there are several arguments for including a brief discussion of this remarkable work. First, most of the works analysed in this chapter are a bit anomalous within their genre, in the sense that rather than pertaining to a particular discourse, they express the views of individuals concerning statecraft and rulership, and, instead of strengthening the discursive layer of accepting and legitimizing royal authority, tend to criticize and re-imagine it. Second, Ali's work is to a certain extent hybrid, not only because the author mixes exposés, anecdotes, and poetry, but also because in his *Counsel for the sultans* he included an autobiographical chapter in which he explicates his own position and his professional vicissitudes, an element that does not belong to the generic conventions. Moreover, Ali also—separately—wrote a poem in which he expresses his fierce criticism of the situation of the empire. And, fourth, it is important to realize that works of criticism appeared in the context of not only the Chinese and European enlightenments, but also in what may be called the Islamic enlightenment as it was conceived in the Ottoman, Persian, and Mughal empires.

As said above, Mustafa Ali's book was inspired by the many abuses he observed within the bureaucratic apparatus on various levels. It is quite explic-

itly written from the perspective of a bureaucrat, whose remarks are primarily directed at the functioning of the state as an administrative apparatus, consisting of officials of various ranks executing preconceived tasks. But first of all, Ali argues that there is nothing wrong in asking the advice of someone who has an 'exquisite mind, zeal and education', who is a 'man of rectitude that has nothing to fear from anybody, loyal to the bread and the salt of the king, but not taking notice of anybody else'.[2] For officials, it is even a duty to 'assist the ruler with advice'.[3] Since the king and his subjects, especially army commanders and statesmen, constitute a single organism, it is essential to always tell the truth in all frankness. This 'humble sinner' (Ali) has also received advice in his dreams, from such 'holy men' as Firdawsi, Galen, Sa'di, Hafiz, and Jami.

The first principle of rulership, according to Ali, is that the king's judgement be based on justice, equity, reliability, and integrity, and the ultimate aim be to improve the state of the poor. A sudden enrichment of bazaar merchants is a clear indication of mismanagement. The first official responsible for good government is the vizier, who has to prevent the oppression and tyranny of the administrators. In recent years, the viziers have been motivated by greed, which has resulted in injustice, corruption, and the exclusion from office of educated people who had not been trained in the imperial palace. It is here that the responsibility of the sultan comes in, because it is his task to supervise the viziers and intervene when necessary. If the sultan neglects this task, he becomes responsible for the 'atrocities' committed by the viziers:

> To appoint ignorants when there are wise men available, to choose those who excel in flattery and eulogy rather than those who are truthful and just, is not only equal to condoning the oppression of the people but also a shining example of the maxim: 'He who delegates an act to a person betrays God and His Prophet and His community, the true believers'.[4]

This supervision is crucial for the preservation of the empire: 'For so long as the king shows no circumspection and alertness in the supervision of the viziers, he implicitly authorizes the oppression of the Believers and by selecting the tyrannical vizier he approves of the destruction of his country.'[5] Unfortunately, at present the sultan has 'abandoned the principle of togetherness, that was

2 Mustafa bin Ahmet Ali, *Mustafa Ali's Counsel for Sultans: Edition, Translation, Notes*, Andreas Tietze, ed., 2 vols. (Vienna, 1979–1982) vol. 1, 20.

3 Ibid., 23.

4 Ibid., 19.

5 Ibid., 27.

sponsored by his great ancestors, and (thus) his intercourse and close contact with high and low as well as his personal interference to stop oppression are no more feasible.'[6]

After these introductory remarks, which indicate the outline of Ali's argument, the author continues to say that in principle the Ottomans have a good foundation for governance: They are healthy and pious; they have a good administrative organization, a good control of finances, beautiful palaces, and efficient troops. Like Solomon, Alexander the Great, and Timur Lang—who also conquered the throne through struggle—they are prone to be great sovereigns. However, after the initial period of strength, the empire fell into decay because of unwarranted expenses for all kinds of luxury goods and useless servants (such as cooks, bread bakers, pantry-servants, and court artisans, 'that pompous ilk')[7] and because of the spread of corruption and bribes. Most importantly, the corruption has resulted in the appointment of fools and incapable officials, excluding sensible and talented men from high posts. Ali's narrative is systematically supplemented with exemplary anecdotes figuring famous kings and forefathers, but also relating his own experience as an official. Then he systematically discusses the state of the various segments of the administration, from the military to the management of religious foundations.

In the fourth chapter, Ali complements his remarks on the principles of governance and the state of the empire with a brief outline of his own experiences as an official in the Ottoman bureaucracy. He emphasizes that his book is not written to express his grudges against the state apparatus, or out of defiance or opportunism. All the information he gives is based on reliable information and his personal experiences. To fortify his position, Ali begins by mentioning his literary works. As becomes clear in this chapter, this is a structural element in Ali's pledge and self-defence: throughout the text his literary talents are referred to and displayed, as evidence that he is capable of fulfilling important functions and merits such an appointment. His adversities began when he, as an official at the court, was disliked by the tutor of the young prince Selim, the future sultan. As a result of this enmity, Ali was sent away from the court and left for Damascus. His request to be appointed as a judge or teacher in a *madrasa* was summarily rejected with reference to his lack of a proper education. Eventually he acquired the position of secretary of the *divan*.[8]

---

6 Ibid., 25.

7 Ibid., 61.

8 For a description of Ali's life, see Jan Schmidt, *Mustafâ 'Âlî's Künhü 'l-Ahbâr and its Preface According to The Leiden Manuscript*, Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut te Istanbul (Istanbul, 1987).

Ali partly reproaches Selim for his hardships. When he accompanied him on a hunting excursion, Selim asked him to compose a poem for him. Ali complied and was rewarded. Therefore, it was certain that Selim knew about him, but eventually neglected him. When a new commander was installed who was responsible for appointments, Ali offered him a poem, but instead of being rewarded he was appointed to a post on the border of Rumeli, Bosnia, where he supported the holy war. For eight years Ali pined away at what he calls 'the edge of the world'.[9] During all these years he wrote poems for Selim, but no high position was awarded to him. Ali adds some historical examples of poets whose talents were not valued by rulers, most notably the great Persian poet Firdawsi.

Later, Ali found a protector in the person of the army commander Lala Mustafa Pasha, who took him along as a secretary on one of his campaigns. Ali asked to become a financial director, but this request was refused. Later he was once again appointed secretary of a military expedition, being charged with the task of organizing the transport of food and ammunition. Although he performed his assignments much better than his colleagues, according to his own estimation, he was not rewarded. On the contrary, he was obstructed by others and finally someone else was appointed in his place. Meanwhile, Ali kept showering high officials with poems, to no avail. He mentions the case of the sultan's companion Shemsi Pasha, with whom he was acquainted, but who refused to support his efforts. Ali concludes that there is no appreciation for literary talent, which is, however, the most essential skill: 'The cause of Adam's deputyship and the reason for man's nobility was the blessing of the sweet skill of speech and the evidence of [his] awareness of God.'[10] The neglect of this talent results in the lamentable practice of preferring inferior men above qualified men, and 'the evil custom of appointing unqualified persons in use in the house of Osman from the early days of Sultan Suleyman.'[11]

Mustafa Ali would not be true to himself if he had not also laid down his complaints in a poem. The text, which was written about the same time as the *Counsel for the sultans* (1581/2), is called *Khulasatu-l-ahval*, or '*Summary of circumstances*'. In the beginning, it summarizes the rather gloomy atmosphere of the poem by offering a pessimistic view of life:

9 Ali, *Mustafa Ali's Counsel*, 73.

10 Ibid., 93.

11 Ibid.

No sooner were you born when you started to lament,
For you understood that your entrance was already the cause of your exit.[12]

In the following verses the distressful situation of man is more precisely defined:

The fight for one's living is a universal calamity;
In it there is no exception for any individual.[13]

And:

This [world] is like an instrument out of tune, that is being played.
You think to get it into tune? What an absurd thought![14]

These laments continue for some time before the poet arrives at his actual purpose, which is to give a survey of the precariousness of the various positions in society, ranging from the ruler, the king, to the most modest artisans and farmers, passing by the different classes and professions. First, the unenviable position of the king is described:

You are the living force in the souls of the people of the world
And nevertheless you are embodied—herein lies the mystery.
On the royal throne you are without equal,
You are the only, the chosen man.
As long as you embrace the bride, namely, kingship
You are a male lion, the recognized leader.
[However,] when the prestige of the kingdom comes to your mind
You are more sorrow-troubled than a beggar.
He who knows about your circumstances, O king,
That there are days when you are lowlier than a [lowly] subject.
If you have no sons, then day and night
You are afflicted with constant frustration.
If you have two, you love one more,
For one you are honey, for the other poison.

12 Andreas Tietze, 'The Poet as Critique of Society: A 16th century Ottoman poem', *Turcica. Revue d'études turques* 9, no. 1 (1977) 145.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

If they unite and scheme for your throne, out of grief
You punish them with death, a maiming sword.[15]

Next, the poet turns his attention to the viziers:

Apart from His Majesty the king himself
Your orders affect everybody.
Many viziers, who are in rank below you,
Constantly spy out your shortcomings.
On the other hand, the fear of the king
Paralyzes you with anguish night and day.
Woe unto you if you deviate from justice,
If you erect the castle of bribe-taking!
In that case, God will turn your enemy,
Will assign you a place in the fire of Hell.[16]

The ulama—religious scholars and functionaries—are no less unfortunate:

If you are a judge, you have paid cash to obtain the position
And have [thus] become a slave to the coins of bribery.
Although by law your term of office is three years,
You will be dismayed by three dismissals a year.
[…]
If you are a *medrese* professor immersed in [constant] study,
Then you are notorious for your poverty.
Drawing out [your] speech for the sake of collecting [wealth]
You have become a discussant of logic and theology.
If you are a *medrese* student, you have become mangy and leprous
Drinking the saltless soup of the charity soup-kitchen.[17]

The poet continues to discuss the circumstances of the governors, the holders of different kinds of fiefs, who are crushed between the exactions of the state and the financial stress of the subjects and are forced to have recourse to oppression. Similarly, the financial directors are scrutinized by the viziers, demanding payments from the treasury, while threatening to accuse the direc-

15 Ibid., 146.
16 Ibid., 147.
17 Ibid., 148.

tors of taking bribes. They must always be 'ready for dismissal and investigation'.[18] The pious sheykhs, in contrast, with their miraculous powers, can become either the dream-interpreter of the sultan or a destitute travelling dervish: 'The load of tooth-cleaning wood, dervish cloak, and dervish headgear/ Loading on yourself, you will resemble an ass.'[19] Needless to say, 'eloquent and renowned' poets are no less unfortunate.

In the lower segments of society, such as the fief holders, guardsmen, Janissaries, preachers, imams, merchants, and shopkeepers the situation is just as deplorable, since they all suffer from exactions, low salaries or incomes, injustice, oppression, pressures, etc., making life miserable or even virtually impossible. Finally, the farmers are pitied for their harsh fate, having to labour without respite for a meagre income: 'Whatever you harvest from your fields,/ Half of it is being plundered under the name of tithes./ Counting [and separating] the odd and the even ones, he takes your entire harvest,/ That tyrant, the servant of the tax-gatherer, as soon as he appears.'[20] The poem is concluded with the suggestion that the only way to endure the relentless world described in the verses is to turn to mystical love:

> The only means to find peace in this world
> Is to let yourself crush by the illness of Love.
> If your love is of the true kind,
> You become the governor of the people of the mystical union with God.
> If you attain [the goal of] mystical love,
> Your heart will be free of the griefs of the world.
> For a philosophical mind, the pain of love doesn't count as trouble,
> He regards it as God's favour.[21]

It is, however, unclear whether this advice is meant seriously or ironically. Only an equanimous mind can tolerate the hardships of life; it is useless to try to remedy them.

Mustafa Ali's work gives a unique insight into the workings of the Ottoman state apparatus at the end of the sixteenth century and its many deficiencies. It is unique because it unrestrainedly uncovers the many ailments and weaknesses in the practice of government, ranging from negligence of the sultan to corruption, nepotism, oppression, and injustice, according to the standard

18 Ibid., 152.
19 Ibid., 153.
20 Ibid., 158.
21 Ibid., 159.

principles of statecraft, but also because it describes them from the perspective of an individual, subjective observer, who systematically links the abuses to his personal situation. Ali combines the description of the administration with an account of his personal experiences, perhaps not out of opportunism, but surely to complain about the lack of appreciation shown to him and perhaps hoping to, finally, be adequately rewarded for his loyalty. His criticism of the state is quite explicit, but it must be noted that he never attacks the institutions of the state themselves. He does not oppose despotism in the sense that he advocates the abolition or revision of the sultanate, nor does he propose reforms of the other state institutions, such as the vizierate or the other administrative offices. He emphasizes time and again that the crux of the matter is the appointment of worthy people and the elimination of bribery and nepotism, of which he himself claims to have been a victim. The remedy is that everyone, including the sultan, should have the same moral integrity and administrative insight as Mustafa Ali himself.

Against the Old Order: Huang Zongxi and Hung Sheng

Nowhere is the delicacy of the relationship between an emperor and his ministers more visible than in Chinese history, with its complex combination of institutionalized and personal power. Authority is vested in the dynastic system, which is connected with heavenly forces, but which is also concentrated in the figure of the emperor, whose conduct and moral integrity are crucial for the functioning of the system as a whole. A minister, consequently, is incorporated into the administrative system, even imprisoned in it, while at the same time being directly confronted with the emperor as a person, with his arbitrariness, his eccentricity, and his impulsivity. We have seen above how this precarious relationship can turn into disaster, when the emperor loses his way, or, for that matter, if the minister neglects his duties. We have also seen how at an early stage efforts were made to regulate the relationship between emperor and minister, for instance by the prince/ philosopher Han Feizi, who developed a Machiavellian view of the methods to be used by the emperor to secure the loyalty and obedience of his officials. These ideas were in line with the so-called Legalist School, which dominated Chinese administrative practice in a structural way.

In the seventeenth century, after the Qing (Manchu) emperors had replaced the Ming as the ruling dynasty, philosophical and political thought was influenced by a wave of Neo-Confucianism bent on adapting Confucian moralism to form a counter-movement against established ideologies. This new spirit is

exemplified by a political treatise titled *Waiting for the dawn* by Huang Zongxi, which was published in 1663. The author was a government official who retired after the Qing takeover of the empire in 1644 and who compared himself to the sage Jici, who retired from public life at the end of the Shang dynasty (1122 B.C.) out of despair over the political situation and to wait for a new 'dawn', the emergence of a saviour-king, as told in the story *The expedition of Wu*, discussed in Chapter One, and in *Creation of the Gods* (Chapter Three). His critique was directed essentially at the Ming system of government, but it was so far-reaching that it inevitably estranged him from the new dynasty as well, since he saw their ascendancy as the result of the decline of proper Chinese government.

Huang Zongxi's treatise is an uncompromising attack on the system of imperial rule, based on a new vision of authentic Confucian morality. According to Huang Zongxi, after the installation of the dynastic system China had experienced a steady period of decline since the end of the Zhou dynasty (third century B.C.). He also turns against the Legalism of Han Feizi, whose ideas led to a centralization of power and an oppressive system of economic and fiscal regulation. The combination of these two developments resulted in a system in which the emperor considered his dynastic power as his inherited, God-given privilege, and the empire as his personal fief, to be exploited to pay for his personal pleasures and status. The ministers became his personal servants forced to obey his every whim. The sense that government was meant to serve the interests of the people and that the exalted position of the emperor implied self-sacrifice for the public cause was lost. Huang Zongxi advocates a restoration of the dignity of the ministers, as a counterbalance to the power of the emperor, arguing against the efforts of Han Feizi to strengthen the position of the emperor *vis-à-vis* his officials. Huang Zongxi most forcefully fulminates against the palace eunuchs, who for him symbolize the decadence of the imperial system and the subservience of the public cause to the emperor's personal inclinations.

Huang Zongxi's critique breathes the spirit of enlightenment, since he proposes a rehabilitation of the ministerial functions, a division of power between the emperor and his officials, a new system of education, and economic and fiscal reform. A comparable critical attitude, and likewise a remarkably personal voice, can be discerned in a literary work by Hung Sheng, which appeared slightly later. Hung Sheng (1645–1704) came from a family of officials, but he himself held only an office at the Imperial College. In 1688 he published his opera *The palace of eternal youth*, which immediately became popular and attracted the attention of the emperor himself. Because of the criticism expressed in the lyrics, Hung Sheng was dismissed from his teaching post, and

the audience and the entourage of the author were punished as well. Apparently, it was the combination of political critique and the ventilation of nationalist sentiments, against Manchu rule, that had evoked the emperor's wrath.

As in most of the Chinese narratives studied here, the story of *The palace of eternal youth* is based on a historical episode, in this case involving a revolt against the Tang emperor Ming Huang (618–907). Ming Huang was famous for his love for music; he founded two conservatories of music and was enamoured of his concubine Yang Yuhuan, who was a well-known singer, composer, and dancer. Gradually the emperor became devoted to his pleasures and to squandering and exploitation. It was then that an official, An Lushan, staged a revolt against the emperor and occupied the capital. This historical account is slightly, but significantly, adapted by Hung Sheng. When the Tang emperor is introduced, he is first of all marked by his good government: 'I have appointed able ministers to govern my empire. All is quiet along the frontier, my people have good harvests, and peace reigns throughout the world as in the Golden Age of Old. I have spent my leisure lately enjoying music and women.'[22] This summarizes the main criteria for good government, but it is added that the emperor loves women, music, and dance, too. These pastimes are indulged in in the company of the emperor's favourite concubine Lady Yang, the cousin of Prime Minister Yang, and a talented musician and composer.

The two main characters at the level below the emperor and his concubine are An Lushan, an officer who has suffered a humiliating defeat but who has a 'soaring ambition' and is strong as a 'fiery dragon biding its time',[23] and Prime Minister Yang, who accepts bribes and has An Lushan, in spite of his defeat, nominated to a post in the capital. An Lushan's main opponent is General Kuo, who is ambitious as well, but who is frustrated because he is assigned only a minor post. In his loyalty, he is anxious about the fate of the empire: 'Having passed the military examination, I have come to the capital to await my appointment. I find that Prime Minister Yang is taking all power into his own hands, and An Lushan is the emperor's favourite. The government is going to rack and ruin, while a man of my calibre still lacks an official post. Heaven knows how much longer I must wait to save my country.'[24] Another main character is the eunuch, Kao, who serves both the emperor and Lady Yang and who mediates between the two when there are signs of estrangement, mainly because of the emperor's carelessness

22 Hung Sheng, *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing, 1955) 9.

23 Ibid., 16.

24 Ibid., 56.

The main intrigue involves Prime Minister Yang and An Lushan, who hold each other in a fatal grip because they are aware of each other's corrupt practices. Using blackmail, An Lushan succeeds in obtaining a military post on the northern border, where he starts recruiting Tartar chiefs, barbarians, outlaws, criminals, and northern tribal warriors. When he is strong enough, he falsifies a decree calling him to the capital and sets out with his troops to fulfil his ambitions and seize the throne. In the meantime, the emperor is occupied with palace intrigues and feasting, which culminates in the celebration of Lady Yang, when an enchanting composition of hers is played and she and the emperor make a vow of eternal love in the Palace of Eternal Youth. Soon, however, An Lushan invades the capital with his troops, and the emperor has to flee. Prime Minister Yang is executed for his treachery, and, under the pressure of the loyal troops, Lady Yang is forced to commit suicide, because she is his cousin. Now Kuo grabs his opportunity to perform his heroic role. He gathers his troops, marches to the capital, and restores the emperor to his throne.

Of course, this schematic summary hardly does justice to the well-balanced scenes, characters, and roles conceived by the author, but it can serve as a frame to explain the actual purport of the text. It is clear that the plot revolves around two villains and a hero, and an emperor who is so to speak caught in between. Whereas the positions of Yang, An Lushan, and Kuo are clear, the assessment of the role of the emperor is more ambiguous. He is criticized for his indulgence in pleasures and luxury, for instance when a peasant is killed under the horse of a messenger, who was sent to the southern provinces just to fetch fresh lychee fruits for Lady Yang. The peasant complains: 'The peasant's lot is hard,/ With worry about drought and rain;/ Only this little grain every year/ Yet after harvest half of it goes for taxes,/ And what is left is not enough to eat/ So every day we pray to Heaven/ To let it ripen soon.'[25] On another occasion it is a peasant, once again, who expresses his complaints about the emperor's refusal to heed warnings and prevent Prime Minister Yang from taking bribes.

The second character criticizing the government of the empire is General Kuo, who laments that the legendary heroes have all died out and that the prime minister is raised to a lofty status by the emperor: 'Private citizens usurp the emperor's prerogatives, rival each other's luxury and boast of their fine palaces. Courtiers and ministers flock to fawn on the mighty, yet none dare tell the emperor that these vermilion roofs and brilliant tiles are stained with people's blood.'[26] When he accepts his military post, he is determined to 'set

25 Ibid., 87.

26 Ibid., 59.

the world in order', fight the dark forces, and support the 'tottering throne'.[27] Perhaps paradoxically, he is the one who has the power to confront An Lushan, but in his loyalty he uses it not to usurp the throne himself, but to restore the government of the emperor whom he has criticized, thereby showing his support for the dynasty rather than for the emperor as a person.

Finally, a critical voice is heard from Lei, the famous lute-player, who has become unemployed after the abolition of the conservatory. Lei particularly directs his wrath at An Lushan: 'The emperor has spared you and made you into a prince, but instead of trying to serve the government well, you rebelled with your army. You have befouled the capital and forced the emperor to fly. You are an arch-criminal, who will soon be put to the sword when the imperial army comes back.'[28] His bitterness includes the turncoat officials who now take the side of the rebel: 'The court officials had high positions and huge salaries, and their sons and wives were given titles. They owed all their dignity and wealth to the government; but now, forgetting gratitude in their fear of death, they have all surrendered to the rebels, thinking only of their present comfort and not caring for the verdict of history.'[29] Another musician defends the emperor and Lady Yang, who are not the only ones to blame: The emperor appointed disloyal subjects as frontier generals and let traitors run the government: 'If the good ministers Yao and Sung had been alive, this would never have happened.'[30]

All in all, the verdict on the emperor is not wholly devastating, because others bore responsibility, too. Perhaps the most poignant critique comes from a fairy maid, who asks ironically, referring to Lady Yang's suicide: 'Do you mean to say that the ruler of the whole empire could not protect one woman?'[31] This sentence comprises the different strands of the story, which together clarify the position of the author. It is true that the emperor has made mistakes by neglecting the affairs of the state, indulging in pleasures, and failing to see the true nature of Prime Minister Yang. However, these deficiencies were not caused by undue lasciviousness and decadence on the part of the emperor, but by his true passion for Lady Yang and her music. This is confirmed by the emperor's vow of eternal love, which later allows him to meet his beloved concubine again after she has become a fairy. The integrity of the emperor is saved because he is bound to the ideal of true love, and here the conventional picture is turned around: although the personal inclinations of the emperor are

27 Ibid., 62.
28 Ibid., 174.
29 Ibid., 170.
30 Ibid., 234.
31 Ibid., 199.

a liability to the system and the institutions, in this case he is morally excused, because it was not licentiousness, which caused it, but authentic love.

The narrative of Hung Sheng is based on controversial criteria for judging rulership, and the characters represent stereotypical roles. Still, the implications of the text diverge in part from traditional discourse. First, the role of the emperor is less emblematic; second, whereas usually concubines are singled out as the main cause of decay and corruption, Lady Yang is here exonerated, because she is depicted as a genuinely talented musician and a faithful partner. In the misogynist environment sketched in the previous chapters this is quite an anomaly; and, third, there is an explicit evocation of social injustice, corruption, and 'foreign' interference, which was not very favourable for the Qing state. It is remarkable that fierce comments are expressed by musicians who should be seen, probably, as the mouth-pieces of the author himself in the opera. It is not surprising that the authorities intervened and discharged him. In 1704, traveling on a boat from Nanking, Hung Sheng drank wine, fell into the river, and drowned.

European and Oriental Despots: Montesquieu and Diderot

As we have argued in our Introduction, it is difficult, and often even impossible, to find indisputable evidence for interaction between literary domains without a proper historical framework that can elucidate and explain processes of cultural exchange. Nevertheless, literature in general has a viral capacity, spreading through all kinds of channels and settling in unexpected places. As we have seen, Oriental narrative material quite probably migrated to Europe at least from the late Middle Ages on, as exemplified by works of wisdom such as the cycle of the *Seven sages* and by the traditions of the chivalric romance and the love romance. It was generally assumed in Europe that the art of 'fabulation' was a talent particularly cultivated in the Orient. As contacts between the European nations and what came to be called 'the Orient' increased from the sixteenth century on, patterns of exchange became more clearly visible, as an increasing number of reports of missionaries, merchants, travellers, scholars, and diplomats enhanced European knowledge of exotic societies and aroused the curiosity, especially of philosophers and literati.

Particularly in the eighteenth century, the period of the European Enlightenment, the gradual disclosure of knowledge about the Chinese, Indian, Persian, and Turkish empires had a huge impact on European thought. New insights into the history, society, culture, and religion of the Asian empires necessitated a complete revision of the European self-image and its relationship to other civ-

ilizations. The information about China and India, especially, relativized claims regarding the exclusivity of Christianity as the only true faith and of Western society as the only viable form of social organization. What is usually called the Enlightenment was thus to a large extent a period of redefining Europe's position in a world that was rapidly losing its familiar boundaries and of incorporating knowledge, evaluations, and images of Eastern societies. To be sure, this process was not one-sided; in China, the Mughal Empire, and the Ottoman Empire interest in what Europe had to offer in the fields of art and technology increased, while diplomatic exchanges began to be arranged on a more regular basis.

These developments are clearly reflected in the field of literature. The most visible outcome of the intensified interactions with the Orient was the French translation of the *Thousand and one nights* made by Antoine Galland, which appeared between 1704 and 1717 and which became immensely popular. Although the translation is rightly assessed as a historic event, it does not stand alone. Throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries efforts were made to translate and publish Oriental texts, both religious texts (the Qur'an and the Vedas), and literary and scholarly texts. These efforts were aided by the burgeoning practice of Oriental studies in several European countries and by the sending of missions of students and scholars who not only studied Oriental languages but also collected manuscripts and books. For example, a group of students called 'jeunes de langue' were sent to Istanbul by the French minister Colbert to study Ottoman Turkish and Persian.[32]

The effects of the appearance of the *Thousand and one nights* in Europe should be evaluated on various levels. First, it immediately engendered a taste for what may be called the Oriental tale, which in some cases imitated the peculiar form of the *Nights*, and in other cases was inspired by its exoticism and stereotypical representations; second, it incited European literati, especially in England, France, and Germany, to experiment with new literary forms, based on the metatextual and structural characteristics of the *Nights* and its thematic interests; and, third, it contributed to the formation of a transitional zone, in which cultural interaction between Europe and the Oriental empires took place and where new, exotic, elements were negotiated, adapted, and incorporated into the European intellectual landscape. At all three levels the *Thousand and one nights* became and remained a structural part of European culture, not only as a repository of Oriental images, but as a dynamic paradigm

32 Nicholas Dew, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford etc., 2009); Urs App, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Oxford, 2010).

of literary experimentation and a catalyst of cultural self-reflection. In addition to being integrated into European culture, it also stimulated the translation and publication of Oriental material, such as *Les mille et un jours* (Pétis de la Croix; 1710–1712); *Nouveaux contes orientaux* (Caylus; 1743); *La suite des mille et une nuits* (Dom Chavis, Cazotte; 1788–1789); *Mélanges de littérature orientale* (Cardonne; 1772). Translations of Indian and Chinese texts began to appear as well.

Due to its success, the *Thousand and one nights* became a source of representations and models associated with an imagined Orient. These models replaced the traditional romantic images that had remained from the period of the Crusades and the confrontation between Christianity and the 'Saracens'. While retaining a sense of exoticism, they were adapted to a new reality, which was gleaned from travellers' reports and diplomatic contacts. Some of these representations were relatively new, while others were grafted onto existing models. Among the latter was the trope of the all-powerful king or sultan, who disposed of his subjects at will and whose every whim could have severe repercussions for the empire as a whole. The 'Oriental despot' whose exponents could be found in China, India, Persia, and the Ottoman Empire became one of the dominant tropes, not only in fictional literature, but also in political and philosophical thought. It came to stand for a political system, and within the process of comparison, self-reflection, and self-evaluation, it functioned as a marker for contemplating European political structures. In this section we will briefly discuss two examples of literary representations of the 'Oriental despot' in French literature, which were only indirectly meant as a critique or evaluation of politics in the Orient, but rather as a mirror for French society and, especially, the position of the king. Both texts were deeply influenced by the *Thousand and one nights*, and in addition to the remarkable use of Oriental narrative tropes, the two works stand out for their textual complexity and experimentation with narrative levels, probably at least partly inspired by the *Nights*. The two works are *Lettres persanes* by Montesquieu and *Les bijoux indiscrets* by Denis Diderot.

In *Lettres persanes*, which was published by Montesquieu in 1721 and republished in 1754 with a *supplément*, several trends characteristic of the period converged. The novel is clearly inspired by a work that appeared in 1684 and became popular throughout Europe, *L'espion turc* by the Italian author Marana. It was translated into many languages and expanded into several versions. The work was presented as an episodic description of European society by a pseudo-Turkish observer, sent specially to report on the social and political conditions in the Christian world. Apart from its entertainment value and its significance as an expression of social criticism, the work was also important

because it introduced the literary form of the sequence of letters as a narrative device. This setup not only complicated the narrative structure, but also made possible the main intention of the work: a reflection on European society through the literary figure of the outsider, a foreign traveller who commented on the conditions he witnessed abroad and explained them to his countrymen at home. Of course, this method parodied the genre of the travel account that was blossoming at the time and turned it into a mirror for European society instead of a window on a foreign society to be 'discovered' and described by European travellers.

The second trend visible in *Lettres persanes* is the increase in contacts between Europe and the East and the process of comparison and re-evaluation, which it engendered. Diplomatic exchange was not confined to delegations sent to Eastern sultans and emperors to negotiate trade privileges or political support; it also included some visits of high officials to Europe, from the seventeenth century on, events that attracted enormous public interest and stimulated exotic tastes and fashions, such as the Persian mission of 1715 and the Ottoman mission of Mehmed Efendi in 1720–1721. The pomp and public display connected with these visits fostered the notion of the absolute power of the Oriental despot and of the Orient as a realm of wealth and splendour. However, the travel accounts and the exotic visitors, together with increasing scientific knowledge, introduced a framework of realism into what until then had been an imaginary domain. This framework was dominated by religious and civilizational alterity, but it was also impregnated with the awareness that these exotic societies were part of a homogeneous world in which all shared the same level of reality.

Third, *Lettres persanes* is imbued with the narrative orientalism of the *Thousand and one nights*, which from the beginning of the eighteenth century structured the European, and particularly the French, literary field. The model of the *Thousand and one nights* is especially felt in the serialization of the letters and the way in which it shapes a story that consists of fragments, interruptions, inserted stories, and labyrinthine excursions; and in the intrigues evoked by the juxtaposition of the all-pervasive power of an Oriental male and his harem wives, who are subjected to his authority but in the end refuse to acquiesce in his arbitrariness. As in the *Thousand and one nights*, the intrigue is set in motion when the 'master' leaves his home, thereby jeopardizing an authority that is based, primarily, on his physical presence. It is narrative complexities such as these, together with the insertion of the generic peculiarities of the letter and the travel account, which make *Lettres persanes* such an intriguing text inducing manifold interpretations, explanations, and, above all, questions.

The main character in *Lettres persanes* is Usbek, a Persian prince who has left his palace to travel to Europe to enlighten his mind and enrich it with Western culture. While travelling through Turkey, he writes: 'Nous sommes nés dans un royaume florissant; mais nous n'avons pas cru que tes bornes fussent celles de nos connaissances, et que la lumière orientale dût seule nous éclairer.'[33] Usbek's journey is opposed to the enclosed space of his home, and, more particularly, of the harem, which is both the place of his masculine authority and the location of his most intimate feelings. Zachi, his favourite concubine, writes to him that she misses him; the palace, the place of her desire, is empty, and rivalry has broken out among the women. Usbek, in his turn, responds to this by acknowledging that the women are the recipients of his love. He confesses to a friend that a mysterious jealousy is eating him, caused by the distance from the place of his authority. Even if the women are in the hands of loyal slaves, he is prey to uncertainty.

The third main party in the configuration of correspondents is Ibben, the chief eunuch. Usbek writes to him that he has entrusted him with his most valuable possessions, the most beautiful women of Persia. He urges him to understand his position as an intermediary between him and his women:

> Tu trouves de la gloire à leur rendre les services les plus vils, tu te soumets avec respect et avec crainte à leurs orders légitimes et tu les sers comme l'esclave de leurs esclaves. Mais, par un retour d'empire, tu commandes en maître comme moi-même, quand tu crains le relâchement des lois de la pudeur et de la modestie.[34]

These three parties, Usbek, Ibben, the chief eunuch, and the harem women, are the agents in the narrative intrigue that gradually unfolds in the letters. After some time Ibben begins to complain that the women are becoming disobedient, unwilling to accept his authority, and even that they have illicit meetings with men. From a distance Usbek tries to admonish the women, on the one hand, expressing his love for them but, on the other hand, threatening them with severe punishment. Although apparently the unrest is temporarily soothed, Ibben suddenly writes that the serail is in total disarray: war has broken out between the women, the eunuchs are divided, complaints, reproaches, and rumours are rampant, orders are ignored, and everything seems to be permitted. Usbek summons his wives to obey the eunuch, appealing again to his

33 Montesquieu, *Lettres persanes*, Gonzague Truc, ed. (Paris, 1946) 7.

34 Ibid., 8.

double authority, not only as their master, but also as their husband. Once again, things seem to return to normal, until finally Usbek is informed that insubordination is rife in the harem: Zachi sleeps with a slave; Zélis has taken off her veil in public; a boy was found in the garden; and all women do as they please. Usbek urges Ibben to act severely and exert his authority, while reprimanding his women and threatening to have them punished.

Usbek's desperate instructions have an adverse effect. The women complain that the chief eunuch has installed a regime of terror in the harem and that he has disciplined the women in humiliating ways that defy decency. One of the concubines complains that Usbek incriminates her from a great distance and has delivered her to a 'barbarous eunuch' and a 'tyrant'.[35] The chief eunuch retorts that even Roxane, Usbek's most recent wife, who had appeared faithful until now, has been caught in the loving embrace of a young man. In the final letter Roxane confesses her 'crime': 'Oui, je t' ai trompé; j' ai séduit tes eunuques, je me suis jouée de ta jalousie, et j' ai su, de ton affreux sérail, faire un lieu de délices et de plaisirs.'[36] She asks him how he could think that she would exist only for his whims and could subdue her desires. She was unable to live in servitude and was always free. She reformed his laws to conform to the laws of nature, and she always kept an independent spirit. It was only in appearance that she subjected herself to his fantasies. If he had known her, he would have seen the hate and violence in her. He thought that she had subjected herself, but she has deceived him. Now, to show her independence, she has taken poison and is dying, writing the letter with her last remaining strength.

The falling apart of the configuration of authority by the revolt of the women in the harem draws particular attention to the figure of the eunuch, who is responsible for representing, and exercising, the authority of Usbek. The chief eunuch complains that by having him castrated, his master has 'separated him from himself'.[37] His mutilation has not taken away his desire, but he has to sublimate his pleasure:

> Quoique je les garde pour un autre, le plaisir de me faire obéir me donne une joie secrète: quand je les prive de tout, il me semble que c' est pour moi, et il m' en revient toujours une satisfaction indirecte. Je me trouve dans le sérail comme dans une petite empire.[38]

35 Ibid., 272.
36 Ibid., 275.
37 Ibid., 17.
38 Ibid., 18.

The eunuch himself understands the workings of his power:

> Nous remarquons que, plus nous avons de femmes sous nos yeux, moins elles nous donnent d'embarras. Une plus grande nécessité de plaire, moins de facilité de s'unir, plus d'exemples de soumission: tout cela leur forme des chaînes. Les unes sont sans cesse attentives sur les démarches des autres; il semble que, de concert avec nous, elles travaillent à se rendre plus dependants; elles font une partie de notre ouvrage.[39]

Still, simultaneously, the women treat him as a plaything, with their commands and caprices. It is clear that although he enjoys a power delegated to him by his master, he is unable to assert his authority. This is because everything depends on the presence of the master:

> Mais tout cela, magnifique seigneur, tout cela n'est rien sans la présence du maître. Que pouvons-nous faire avec ce vain fantôme d'une autorité qui ne se communique jamais tout entière? Nous ne représentons que faiblement la moitié de toi-même: nous ne pouvons que leur montrer une odieuse sévérité.[40]

The eunuch's observation that his powers are insufficient to discipline the women as long as their master is absent is confirmed by the women themselves, who feel neglected by Usbek because of his absence and refuse to be 'ruled' by proxy. What is more, Usbek's absence not only removes the authority upholding the relationship between the master and his women, whether it be one of love or power; it also releases the desires and emotions hitherto repressed, either out of love for Usbek or out of fear of punishment. This is what in the end destroys Usbek's authority: the awareness of the falsity of Usbek's perception of his relationship with his women, which is based on the combining of power and love, and which fails to take account of the women's autonomy and desires, according not to the laws of tradition or religion, but to the laws of nature. Usbek's patriarchal 'laws' dissolve before the discovery, by Roxane, of her inherent independence inculcated by nature and repressed by Usbek's despotism. The implosion of the system also reflects the essentially dual nature of Usbek's position: as long as he succeeds in combining his formal authority with his emotional relationship with his women, his authority remains intact.

39 Ibid., 167.

40 Ibid.

But during his absence the emotional bond is broken and what remains is the formal regime implemented by the chief eunuch, which is unable to secure the women's submission.

The storyline of Usbek and his harem, which meanders through the text, itself conveys an intriguing conceptualization of power and authority. Usbek's authority is 'unnatural', constructed only with an appeal to religion and tradition, and not based on a true mutual understanding between him and his wives. It can be perpetuated only by Usbek's presence: as soon as he is physically absent, the system falls apart. It is an authority vested in his person only, in the possibility of personally and physically rewarding and punishing the women, as the component persistently structuring the configuration of relationships. There is no system beyond his person; there is nothing beyond his absolute power, and even if love bonds are part of his power, it is nonetheless artificial and unsustainable. However, it seems that for Usbek, too, the power relations binding him to his harem are unsatisfactory. After all, his absence is caused by his wish to break out of the confines of his native traditions and worldview and to explore other, exotic societies, moving out of his familiar sphere and thereby undermining age-old and fixed habits. Travelling means crossing cultural boundaries and irretrievably relinquishing one's familiar home.

The intrigue of the harem revolt is the dramatic frame that encompasses an elaborate and broad inventory of observations of European societies by Usbek and his cousin Rica. The two have left their homes to collect new impressions and new insights, and Usbek begins his critical evaluations when he traverses the Ottoman Empire. According to him, the Ottoman Empire is weak and ruined, a sick body, whose officials buy their positions with bribes, resulting in the exploitation of the provinces and the evacuation of cities and countryside. There is no trade, because Turks lack the expertise for seafaring; injustice and arbitrariness rule; the possession of land is insecure; Christians and Jews are molested; the military are recalcitrant; and there is no interest in art or technology. While Europe is becoming more and more sophisticated, assiduous, and enterprising, the Ottomans remain ignorant and refuse to adopt new technological inventions. They are, in brief, a society in decay. Only Smyrna, the west-Anatolian port town is prospering because it has been taken over by the Europeans.

This harsh judgement reflects the vision of the Ottoman Empire in Enlightenment Europe, which deemed itself superior to its once mighty rival, because of the more rationalized organization of the administration and the successes of colonization and overseas trade. Usbek's description of other countries, such as Russia, Spain, England, and the northern countries is more concise, except, of course, for France, which is elaborately commented upon in his letters and

those of others. The Persians' interest is directed most of all at two domains: the structure and concept of government and the position of women. The observations oscillate between serious evaluation and irony. The French king is described as

> le plus puissant prince de l'Europe. Il n'a point mines d'or comme le roi d'Espagne, son voisin; mais il a plus de richesses que lui, parce qu'il les tire de la vanité de ses sujets, plus inépuisable que les mines. On lui a vu entreprendre ou soutenir de grandes guerres, n'ayant d'autres fonds que des titres d'honneur à vendre, et, par un prodige de l'orgeuil humain, ses troupes se trouvaient payés, ses places munies, et ses flottes équipées.[41]

He is seconded by another 'magician', the Pope, who is master over the people's spirits and has them believe that bread is not bread and wine is not wine. Nevertheless, the king rules the country with 'genius', admiring the Turkish and Persian systems of government. He has a minister of eighteen years and a mistress of eighty. He loves religion, but persecutes whoever wants to adhere to it too strictly; he loves victories, but distrusts capable generals.

Special attention is given to the judicial embedding of kingship in Europe: 'Le droit public est plus connu en Europe qu'en Asie; cependant on peut dire que les passions des princes, la patience des peoples, la flatterie des écrivains, en ont corrompu tous les principes.'[42] It is here that European rulers differ from the 'Asian' prince, although in practice the outcome is not that different: 'La puissance illimitée de nos sublimes sultans, qui n'a d'autre règle qu'elle-même, ne produit pas plus de monstres que cet art indigne qui veut faire plier la justice, tout inflexible qu'elle est.'[43] Therefore, the power of the European kings is less absolute that that of the Asian sultans, since they developed a different balance between the powers of the people and that of the prince. It is the judicial system that guards this balance and gives the 'Christian princes' an advantage over 'our sultans'.[44] Asian princes hide themselves in order to make themselves respectable, but the result is that the populace respects the institution of royalty, not the king as a person.

In general, the main criterion to judge governments is the extent to which they are based on reason. In theory, the most perfect government is 'celui qui va à son but à moins de frais; de sorte que celui qui conduit les hommes de

41 Ibid., 43.
42 Ibid., 163.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 176.

la manière qui convient le plus à leur penchant et à leur inclination est le plus parfait.'[45] The judicial system, too, should be based on reason. This emphasis on rationality is extended to the domain of religion, that is to say that the Persians are certainly religious and prefer their own religion over Christianity, but in general they object against overly pharisaic readings of the religious texts and against religious intolerance. It is not the multiplicity of religions that causes war, but the spirit of proselytism. Usbek openly argues that if there is a God, He should necessarily be just, and he denounces 'docteurs' who represent God as a Being exerting His power in a tyrannical way. Religiosity in Europe is still to a large extent tinged with hypocrisy and superstition, and is less strong than in Muslim countries. Belief in 'ignorance occulte' and 'diablerie' is widespread alongside scientific interests. As a concluding remark, Usbek observes that the best way to serve God is to heed the regulations of society and the obligations of humanity, because religion is meant to make people happy.

The comments on the French are entwined with elaborate comments on the role and position of women, and it is here, of course, where the two layers of the narrative converge. The discussion focuses on two issues: the power of women in politics and at the court, and the liberty of women in society more generally. The first issue is treated with some irony, Usbek stating that a European king can be acknowledged only if he has passed two tests, by his ministers and by his confessor. In France the king is 'absolutely' governed by women, who decide on all appointments at the court and who help each other to construe a kind of separate republic, a 'state within a state'.[46] In fact, if complaints are heard that Persia is ruled by two or three women, it is worse in France, which is generally governed by women, who have appropriated all authority. They are the instigators of revolts and dissent, drawing into their quarrels the whole kingdom and all noble families.

It is clear that in France women have more liberty than in Persia. Here the women have no shame or virtue, and they present themselves before men with an uncovered face. This is unacceptable: 'Au lieu de cette noble simplicité et de cette amiable pudeur qui règne parmi vous, on voit une impudence brutale, à laquelle il est impossible de s'accoutumer.'[47] Still, there are some advantages, since although the women in France are less beautiful, they are livelier and generally enhance the atmosphere with their humour. The question is, of course, whether it is advisable to give women more freedom or not. The

45 Ibid., 143.

46 Ibid., 186–187.

47 Ibid., 49.

European case is a bad example, since a man who wants to monopolize his wife is seen as a spoilsport, a 'perturbateur de la joie publique et comme un insensé qui voudrait jouir de la lumière du soleil à l'exclusion des autres hommes.'[48] However, it is clear that to presuppose that Nature has made man superior to women is a form of tyranny. On the other hand, it is clear, too, that Nature has made their beauty irresistible. Here the dilemma of Usbek's position comes into the open: his authority is based on false premises, but there seems to be no solution other than submitting to the power of women or exerting disciplinary power over them. It is the contradiction between his absolute power and the mitigations of this power by the presence of women that in the end results in the implosion of the system upholding it. Power that is not in harmony with reason and Nature will never be transformed into authority but always remain a form of repression. And the inherent contradictions in the system are revealed through accepting the porosity of its boundaries.

Before discussing the various aspects of the discourse of kingship in Montesquieu's *Lettres persanes*, we will first summarize our second text in this section, *Les bijoux indiscrets* by Denis Diderot. Diderot is, of course, one of the main exponents of the French—and European—Enlightenment, who published a wide range of texts varying from philosophical and political contemplations to satirical novels. He is most famous for his work on the *Encyclopédie*, the ambitious effort to collect 'enlightened' knowledge in a single, huge, reference work. It became one of the monuments of the period, embodying the spirit of an age often seen as the formative period of modernity. Diderot was also an independent spirit, openly expressing his fierce criticism of French absolutism and, especially, of the Catholic Church, and advocating atheism and democracy as radical attitudes against the hypocrisy and repression of the established institutions. Although his thought is perhaps less systematic and more varied than Montesquieu's, it reveals a remarkably forceful and 'modern' intellect, in its uncompromising appeal to reason and honesty. His novels fit into the framework of French literary taste in the eighteenth century, with its tendency to orientalism, social critique, and both sophisticated and libertine irony.

The novel *Les bijoux indiscrets* was Diderot's first novel, published in 1748 and later reprinted several times. The story is set in the time of Sultan Schachbaam, a grandson of the well-known storyteller Shahrazad, and emperor of the Mogol Empire. This setting is one of the many references to French authors of Diderot's age and more in particular to the novel *Le sopha* by Crébillon fils. In this

48 Ibid., 97.

FIGURE 10 *Portuguese map of Malacca (1666).*

novel a bored sultan is entertained by stories about the adventures of a sopha and the amorous and adulterous scenes it witnessed in its eventful existence. The book is both an erotic novel and a comment on French high society and its sexual morals. Diderot's reference to this work, of course, enhances his ironic intentions: he is satirizing not only French society, but also French authors who ironically comment on it, and their use of Oriental motifs derived from Antoine Galland's translation of the *Thousand and one nights*. Diderot's book clearly outshines Crébillon's novel in satirical wit and erotic permissiveness.

The novel is conceived as a rendition of the work of an African chronicler, containing the account of King Mangogul, who is the 1234500th scion of a dynasty of kings of Kongo, a rather diffuse kingdom in Africa. Mangogul has acquired fame by winning battles, conquering cities, expanding the empire, restoring peace and order, stimulating science and the arts, bringing finances under control, constructing buildings, creating useful institutions, upholding the law, and founding academies. He has his equal only in some French novels. He is mild, friendly, good-humoured, polite, and sensible, but he nevertheless enjoys the pleasures of life. He gave women their freedom. When one day the sultan is bored, his favourite concubine Mirzoza, who has a talent for story-

telling, proposes to send for the genie Cucufa to provide some entertainment. Cucufa arrives carried by two owls and hands them a magic ring, which has the power to make the person who wears it invisible and will enable him to hear the stories of the adventures of women, told by the 'jewel' between their legs. When the news of the existence of the ring spreads, it creates unrest among the notables, because evidently the 'jewels' will tell the truth, avoiding all deceit and prejudices, and, thus, revealing all forms of hypocrisy. The notables will not only risk losing their reputation, but they will have to adapt their habits and become dependent on the powers of the new interrogating device.

The issue of the ring is discussed in various circles of Kongolese society. The Academy of Sciences, charged with the task of seeking truth, discusses the matter, but the deliberations end in shouting and mutual insults. The Brahmins who investigate the matter attribute it to Brahma, who is the only one able to break the natural order and who, eventually, will reveal his intentions. An inventor develops a special 'muzzle' for the ladies' private parts, to protect them against their loquacity. It is clear that the ring causes social upheavals and disruptions within the upper echelons of society, but it can also serve as a useful tool, for instance when a faithless lover is accused of rape and an interrogation with the help of the ring can prove his innocence or guilt. In general, many cases of social unrest can now be examined and explained, since the ring cannot be deceived and the 'jewels', perhaps paradoxically, can tell only the truth. As Mirzoza formulates it: 'Si nos bijoux pouvaient expliquer toutes nos fantaisies, ils seraient plus savants que nous-mêmes.'[49]

Mirzoza and Mangogul now agree to hold a contest, since Mirzoza claims that the ring will prove that there are not only licentious, lusty, coquettish courtisan-women, but also loving and faithful wives. The king is sceptical, but he accepts the bet, cautiously refraining from pointing the ring at Mirzoza, since this would indicate that he does not trust her loyalty. What follows is a rather extravagant exploration of the secret interior of French society, in its different components and segments. It is interrupted by several inserted episodes, such as the famous 'philosophical' dream of Mangogul, with a child approaching him and metamorphosing into a giant, as the embodiment of 'experience', and a rather bizarre dream of Mirzoza, followed by an digression on Mirzoza's metaphysics. All these insertions, accompanied by references to contemporaneous writers and thinkers, can be read as comments on intellectual life of the time and Diderot's position among them.

49 Denis Diderot, *Les bijoux indiscrets*, in: *Oeuvres de Diderot*, André Billy, ed. (Paris, 1951) 83.

A relatively long inserted story is the account of the peregrinations of Selim, a courtier who relates his amorous adventures as a young man throughout Europe. He journeys from Tunis to Lisbon and to Spain, France, and England, where he meets all kinds of adulterous women. They are attracted by his African appearance: "'Un jeune seigneur du Congo, disait une belle marquise; eh! mais cela doit être fort plaisant; ces hommes-là valent mieux que les nôtres. Le Congo, je crois, n'est pas loin de Maroc."'[50] The gallant adventures are continued in India and Constantinople, but 'Je ne goûtais point les usages d'un people chez qui les bijoux sont arricadés; et je sortis promptement d'une contrée où je risquerais ma liberté. Je pratiquai pourtant assez les musulmans, pour m'apercevoir qu'ils se sont bien polices par le commerce des Européens.'[51] Selim's account is not without its serious overtones. During his travels he studies the fortifications, horsemanship, arms, music and dance, customs, and arts of the countries he visits, and particularly their political and military apparatus.

In a special 'intermezzo', Selim zooms in on Kongo itself, to describe the condition of the empire under Mangogul's grandfather, Kanoglu. At that time the court was like a 'court of immorality', which served as an example for the whole empire. The sultan had innumerable mistresses and was imitated in this by the notables and the common people. At court luxury and sophistication reigned, resulting in debts and the squandering of money on the construction of palaces while the people starved. The treasury was empty, the ships were rotting away, and the fields were lying waste. The king tolerated only subjects who were of the same frame of mind as he, and two million people were expelled. The king's favourite concubine became so powerful that the palace turned into a 'gallery of puppets', and the influence of this situation was felt throughout the empire. Women became ugly and had to wear cosmetics; men started to behave in unnatural and affected ways.

Selim's account is closed by an inserted story about true love, indicating that sincerity is still possible and that true love can be retrieved even if it seems only a distant dream. In the end, Mangogul returns the ring to Cucufa.

Diderot's *Les bijoux indiscrets* is not merely an orientalist fantasy, but rather a scathing critique of French society, and above all of the royal court and its promiscuous manners. Selim's story of Mangogul's grandfather is a thinly disguised portrait of the previous king Louis XIV, with his imperial inclinations, absolutism, and decadence. As in many other texts, the corruption of the king

50 Ibid., 180.

51 Ibid., 197.

is seen as the epicentre of societal decay, caused by the neglect of economic conditions, ineffectual financial policies, indulgence in luxury and pleasures, moral laxity, arbitrariness, etc. The king is the personification of the moral standards of his kingdom, and his example is copied on all levels of society. Everything he does has major consequences, and his narrowmindedness has led to the emigration of millions of his subjects, a clear reference to Louis's revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1598), which caused many Protestants to leave France. Diderot's abhorrence of Louis XIV's absolutism was one of the sentiments he shared with Montesquieu.

If we compare the two narratives discussed above, we can perceive some significant similarities. The first important resemblance is that they both develop their narratives from an external perspective. This is done not only to conform to the contemporary fashion of orientalism, in spite of the clear references to the *Thousand and one nights*, nor merely to disguise criticism of the political establishment in a more indirect form, to escape censorship or legal repercussions. The perspective is chosen, more probably, because by that time a vision of Oriental despotism had crystallized that was shaped not only by romantic visions of a mysterious Orient but increasingly informed by knowledge of Oriental societies and civilizations. Representations of the Orient had gathered sufficient 'realism' to be used as a kind of mirror for European society and to compare customs and concepts, principles and practices. Of course, the use of a 'foreign' observer and narrator is an innovation of great significance that transforms the generic and discursive purport of the texts. This innovation was made possible by combining the genre of the travel account, providing factual information, with fictional Oriental literature, such as the *Thousand and one nights*, which provided intrigues, motifs, and narrative strategies.

The outsider's perspective necessitated an innovative complexity of the narrative structure, more particularly a form of generic hybridity. Both novels can be called experimental in the sense that they were situated in a domain not generically or discursively demarcated and ordered, but rather consisting of the compilation of elements from different genres. In both cases this resulted in a complex mechanism of self-reflexivity, a 'palace of mirrors', constructed by the various narrative perspectives and the literary forms used to integrate them. This is most conspicuous in *Lettres persanes*, in which several perspectives alternate, through the use of the peculiar form of correspondence. The Persian narrators relate their adventures and life in Persia, Turkey, and Europe, thereby representing the typical schizophrenia of the traveller who connects with his familiar environment while at the same time being separated from it, allowing an outsider's perspective. In the Ottoman Empire, the narrator represents an Oriental perspective on a sister Oriental society, complicating

the European view of the Orient as a single entity and emphasizing that the Ottoman Empire can be observed from different angles, lying between the idealistic self-representations of both Europe and Persia. This fracturing of visions produces a questioning of discourses: to what extent are these accounts 'true'? Or should they be considered as subjective evaluations only?

The bulk of the narrative, of course, consists of a Persian view of European society, but this rather simple perspective is problematized as well. First, it is, of course, a Persian perspective 'invented' by a French author, who thereby attempts to interrogate self-images as opposed to images of the Other, by identifying with the Other in order to dislodge familiar discourses and, to be sure, strengthen arguments and opinions put forward by the author himself. What seemed to be an 'objectively' true self-image is subjectivized by the external observer, but in the process it is 're-objectivized' to the extent that certain components of the self-image are confirmed. Second, at a certain point Rica, Usbek's nephew, dons European dress, marking his identification with his European environment, and his slippage across a cultural boundary. Of course, Rica is presented as a specific person, whose characteristics can be related to his transition: He represents a specific 'type' of Oriental who can make this crossing and identify with the European mentality. Third, at a certain point, Rica speaks about the conditions in Persia with a Frenchman who, however, refuses to believe him, because what Rica recounts does not conform to the travel accounts that the Frenchman has read, by Tavernier and Chardin. Again, this is a complication of the discursive homogeneity, juxtaposing several subjective perspectives with varying truth-claims, which together should constitute a complete, true, vision of an Other, which, in this case, includes a self-image. However, it may not be recognized by the Frenchman that what Rica describes is a self-image, because Rica wears European clothes. Fourth, Usbek writes that he has spoken to a Frenchman who compares Persia to France, saying that in France the people are freer and that in Persia 'dignities' are only 'attributes of the imagination of the sovereign'.[52] This, of course, is a clearly subjective opinion, probably based on limited sources and partly constructed around a dominant self-image. Nevertheless, for Usbek, it turns out to be true: He also has to conclude in the end that his idea of authority was largely based on illusions, as Roxane's final letter makes clear.

In this way, through a complex play with perspectives, built into the narrative setup of the text—with the author and the reader as additional perspectives—Montesquieu constructs an elaborate labyrinth of objectivity and subjectivity,

52 Ibid., 156–157.

images and counter-images. In *Les bijoux indiscrets*, Diderot adopts a different procedure, but here, too, the result is a complex configuration of truth-claims and subjectivities. First, Diderot relates his text to its discursive environment by linking it to the *Thousand and one nights* and a number of contemporary authors. This is not meant to define clear generic markers incorporating it into a genre with a specific set of conventions, but rather to ironically separate it from its generic environment and its established conventions. Second, the text is presented as the translation of an African chronicle, an 'authentic' primary source, presenting a self-image that is a counter-image of European descriptions of other societies, and that, moreover, has a similar truth-claim.

Third, several kinds of texts, from various discursive types, are inserted in the narrative, ranging from allegorical tales to dreams, lectures, etc. The most significant embedded text is the account of Selim, which conveniently combines the *histoire galante*, popular in the seventeenth century, with the travelogue, each with contesting truth-claims as romanticized and truthful representations of the Other. Of course, Selim's account is strongly reminiscent of Usbek's letters in *Lettres persanes*. Fourth, in the end it becomes clear that the whole narrative should be read as a parody, satirizing both the genres evoked in the text and the French society and king. The text is constructed to function as an external mirror in which recognizing one's self-image becomes an estranging experience. Since scientific, religious, and political truth-claims are central to the story, the narrative strategy successfully disrupts their discursive coherence, which Diderot sees as the foundation of the French self-image. As in the case of Usbek's self-image, the outcome is the recognition of subjectivity: systems of authority and order that constitute self-images are ultimately a product of the imagination. As Usbek remarks, the French king derives his authority from an illusion, the inflated pride of his subjects.

By complicating the discursive coherence of self-images, Montesquieu and Diderot not only develop a layered vision of discourses of Self and Other, but also problematize the relationship between texts and the reality to which they refer. In doing so, they investigate the mechanism of texts as an element shaping discourses of reality. This is most effectively done in *Les bijoux indiscrets*, when the confessions of the 'jewels' are presented as the only reliable account of events. Only a normally mute, mindless, physical, material 'source' can give objective information; all other information is distorted either out of hypocrisy, or deceitfulness, or subjectivity. Truth is not anchored in discourse, but in the physical reflexes of desire. Discourses are by definition layered and complex, consisting of rivalling levels of subjectivity. Moreover, they are meant to hide an essential chaos, which is the exclusive domain of honesty. It is this discursive and generic complexity that situates the two novels in what we

have called a 'zone of transition' in which narrative material was shaped and reshaped to incorporate elements from outside, both conceptually and aesthetically.

If we link the two novels with the texts analysed in previous chapters and focus on the theme of kingship, we re-encounter some familiar procedures and tropes. Like many of the other texts, the novels are accounts of initiations, staging a 'prince' who is acquainted with societal and discursive domains that he did not know. Within the process of initiation, the trope of travel is dominant, albeit in different forms, evoking the concepts of the crossing of boundaries and the physical absence from home. The initiation is recorded in a dialogic form—between Usbek and his correspondents, between Mirzoza and the sultan, between Mangogul and his 'interlocutors'—, enabling the author to incorporate the information learned by the characters, allowing the reader to be 'initiated', too, and showing how truth-claims are inherently part of a broader setting, including other participants as well. The 'princes' are not all-powerful; they are subjected to dialogical processes and discursive fragmentation. The dialogical situation is created by the counter-claims of women, who, here too, are central to the narrative procedure, in the personae of the harem women and Mirzoza. It is they who represent a domain that is problematic, difficult to incorporate in hegemonic and homogeneous discourses, and ultimately an indomitable part of the system of power. It is their intervention that reveals that the transformation of power into authority is, in the end, an illusion. Authority is either a form of repression or a cover hiding the absence of any form of 'real' power. All these dialogic situations are set in an overarching dialogic embedding: the interaction between Orient and Occident; the crossing of cultural, political, and civilizational boundaries making possible comparisons and exchanges, and unsettling the discourses on which seemingly objective discourses of power and Self are built. The dialogic principle expounded in *The seven viziers* has here become globalized and found its inherent narrative complexity. And, as in most texts discussed above, it is a compelling incentive for storytelling.

A Modern Mirror-for-Princes: Christoph Martin Wieland's *Der Goldene Spiegel*

If the novels by Montesquieu and Diderot enjoyed wide popularity among French audiences and European readerships, the next narrative to be discussed is less accessible to the general reader. Christoph Martin Wieland's *Der goldene Spiegel* is a complex, hybrid text, since it is essentially a fictional text con-

ceived as a parody on the orientalist vogue, but simultaneously as a mirror-for-princes. Apart from this hybridity, it contains an element of self-reflection through its discussion of the genre of the fairy tale, or *Märchen*, as a medium to educate the general audience and familiarize it with a modern, rational worldview. In that respect the work reflects the textual complexity we found in the previous section, but tinged by some specific generic concerns. It is for these reasons that the work makes an interesting contribution to our argument.

Christoph Martin Wieland was a prominent representative of the German Late Enlightenment (*Spätaufklärung*) who dedicated his intellectual efforts to the presentation of the philosophical ideas of the Enlightenment in treatises and, above all, fictional literature. He can be seen as the last exponent of the didactic rationalism of the eighteenth century and a precursor of Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, whom he befriended in his Weimar years. Wieland was also the author who, following French examples, introduced the *Thousand and one nights* into German literature, although, as we will see, he was critical of the value of this kind of narrative. He is associated with the development of the German *Bildungsroman* as well, which in his interpretation became a less schematic and more novelistic genre, which would inspire Goethe in his writing of the Wilhelm Meister novels. In general, Wieland's work is illustrative of a shift in interest as far as the presentation of civilizational, cultural, and psychological ideals is concerned, from models predominantly taken from Classical Antiquity to the incorporation of Oriental motifs and settings.

Wieland's work can be seen as exemplary for eighteenth-century literature in several respects. He started his literary career with reworkings of some of the tales from *Thousand and one nights*. One of Wieland's major works is *Die Abderiten* (1774–1781), a combination of a *Bildungsroman*, a romance, and a philosophical allegory. In 1780 he published *Oberon*, which can be considered as a parody on the romance genre, staging a hero-knight who has to travel to the Orient to fulfil a vow: to bring back a tooth of the sultan. In 1764 the didactic romance *Don Sylvio von Rosalva* appeared in which he expresses doubts about the didactic capacity of the fairy tale. In this story, Don Rosalva suffers from excessive fantasizing (*Schwärmerei*) as a result of his indulgence in Oriental fairy tales. He is cured, however, after the fashion of Shahrazad, by listening to an exemplary tale, which restores his regular awareness of reality. The message is somewhat ambivalent, but logical: stories can be both harmful and helpful in constructing a rational view of life depending on the way the imagination is used to depict reality. This statement is repeated more explicitly in Wieland's collection of fairy tales *Dschinnistan* (1785–89), in which reworkings of *Thousand and nights* tales and original fairy tales are combined:

The author states in his introduction that he cannot deny the popularity of tales of this kind, but he insists that in order to be valuable for educating the public, they should avoid *Schwärmerei*.[53]

Several themes in Wieland's work come together in one of his major novels entitled *Der goldene Spiegel oder die Könige von Scheschian* ('The golden mirror'), which appeared in 1772.[54] It contains a mirror-for-princes explicating the author's vision of proper rulership. The philosophical status of the text is carefully shrouded in mysteries. After opening with a dedication to Emperor Tai-Tsu, the author exclaims: 'How happy would you be, best of kings, if it were just as easy to *wish* a people to be happy, as to *make* it happy! If you, like the kings of heaven, just had to *want* in order to achieve, just *speak* to see your thoughts transformed into works!'[55] A king needs to distinguish truth from deceit; and to study the history of wisdom and foolishness, opinions and passions, truth and deceit, in the chronicles of human generations.[56] Therefore, this text contains the history of the kings of Scheschian, illustrating great truths, curious times, informative examples, and a truthful depiction of the mistakes and fallacies of the human heart and mind. In brief, the book is indispensable for discovering the reasons for the happiness and suffering of humankind.[57]

In the Introduction that follows, the prehistory of the book is explained: Schach-Gebal, king of Indostan, is a descendant of King Schach-Baham, who is the grandson of the famous Shahrazad. He was raised by a nursemaid who had also raised Shahrazad, and who inculcated a passion for fairy tales in him. His minister thought that all wisdom of the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Greeks was transmitted in fairy tales. His son Lolo was a non-descript ruler, but Lolo's son Schach-Dolka was a declared enemy of fairy tales. He had to listen to stories about storytelling sophas and sentimental geese in pink dominoes so often that he started to loathe them and considered banning all poets from his empire. Schach-Gebal, the current king, governs reasonably well, but he is whimsical and lazy and not inclined to think about principles, projects, and planning. He had built the most sumptuous court ever known, but his squandering had ruined the empire. Intrigues by his priests, courtiers, ministers, and concubines affect his moods and embitter his life. A lady proposes to tell him the stories

53 See about Wieland: Klaus Schaefer, *Christoph Martin Wieland* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 1996).

54 Christoph Martin Wieland, *Der goldene Spiegel oder Die Könige von Scheschian* (Berlin, 2008).

55 Ibid., 8.

56 Ibid., 10.

57 Ibid., 11.

of the *Thousand and one nights*, but they do not appeal to him. According to him, stories should not only be decent, but also truthful and devoid of any hint of the marvellous. The scholars now suggest reading to him a chronicle of the neighbouring empire of Scheschian, written by Hiang-Fu-Tsee, who lived during the reign of Emperor Tai-Tsu, translated from the Chinese into Latin by Father J.G.A.D.G.J., and subsequently translated into German in 1772.

The actual book starts with describing the setting in which the text is to be read: Nurmahal, the sultane, a black-eyed Circassian beauty, will read the text to Schach-Gebal, Danischmend, the court philosopher, and the young boy Mirza. When the sultan yawns three times, the session will be ended, to be resumed the next evening. This is the frame that encompasses the history of Scheschian, the reading of which is interrupted either by comments on the text or by the sultan's falling asleep. The chronicle also contains two exemplary tales, fitted into the text in the manner of Chinese boxes, as in the *Thousand and one nights*.

The history of Scheschian begins when the precarious constellation of small separate states governed by princes and petty tyrants is occupied by Ogul-Kan, who governs his new kingdom according to his temperament and moods. His favourite concubine, Lili, introduces culture, taste, beauty, and refinement into court life. Here Danischmend interrupts the reading to tell a story situated in Arabia in the time of Harun al-Rashid (Schach-Gebal: 'That begins ominously: barbers, hunchbacks, princes who shave their eyebrows …') about an emir who leads a lascivious life and who is reprimanded by a wise old man, who admonishes him to live according to the scheme of nature, balancing pleasure and utility through work, entertainment, and rest. Heeding this principle, the community of the sage lives in peace and harmony, as an ideal society. Resuming the chronicle after this instructive intermezzo, we learn that Ogul-Kan is succeeded by his son Azor, who lets his mother Lili rule the empire. She delegates her tasks to a favourite, who in turn delegates them to a secretary, who delegates them to his mistress, who delegates them to a monk. Such behaviour is, of course, not in accordance with the duties of a king, which consist of establishing justice, appointing the most meritorious ministers, spending the state revenues wisely, and providing security for the people. Rule should not be based on the whims of the king, but on laws, a police force, and moderate taxation.

After his mother's death, Azor becomes enamoured of two women, Xerika, who loves Azor as a person, and Alabanda, who loves Azor as a king. It is the latter who succeeds in subduing him to her will and arranging the government according to her wishes. She builds luxurious palaces and temples, upholding a façade of wealth and happiness, while the common people are starving.

Here the chronicle is interrupted by the 'editor' of the text, who informs the reader that a part of the manuscript is missing. This is followed by a resume of an account relating the religious conflicts in Scheschian between two sects who differ on the nature of the Ape that is the object of veneration. Next, Azor's reign is evaluated; in the meantime the people have grown to hate him, not for his arbitrary despotism, but because he lacks the proper qualifications to be a king: 'A remarkable example; a prince with all the characteristics of a friendly man, with few deficiencies and many virtues, who through lack of princely capacities can bring about as much evil as the most horrific tyrant.'[58]

Azor is succeeded by his son Isfandiar, who considers justice and charity as the highest virtues, but instead of imitating historical examples, he bases his government on the prejudiced, *schwärmerischen*, incoherent doctrines of the priests: As the leader of the sect that emerged victoriously from the civil strife during Azor's reign, he installs a regime of rigidity and intolerance, banning truth, virtue, tenderness, friendship, and all aesthetic sensitivity. But it is a government without principles and delegated to ignorant intriguers. The kingdom falls prey to tyranny: 'How many kings, who had to commit themselves through the holiest oath to live for the happiness of their subjects, remember their pledge after they have taken the first sip from the magic chalice of arbitrary violence?'[59] The populace suffers; repression, censorship, brigandage, and opportunism lead to the ruin of the empire and severe repression: 'To prove that the pleasure of punishing can never be satisfied, it was deemed appropriate to create new opportunities for the nations every day to make itself punishable, and nobody, no, nobody! contemplated that the most punishable, the most horrific of all crimes, is the insult against humanity.'[60]

While religion is used to control the people, and philosophers are destroying the 'building' of religion without providing an alternative, rebellion ensues. Isfandiar is decapitated. The kingdom is saved by his son Tifan, who survives the massacre of his brothers and is raised far from the court by an honest vizier. He is educated in harmony with nature and learns the seven principles: All people are brothers, with equal rights and obligations; essential rights cannot be abolished; everyone owes others what he expects from them; nobody has the right to enslave another man; power should not subjugate, but protect people; man has a right to receive compassion and help merely because he is a human

58 Ibid., 139.
59 Ibid., 153.
60 Ibid., 175.

being; man cannot demand from others to be clad and fed in a luxurious way.[61] These principles are derived from the laws of God, whose validity cannot be annulled, and whose realization is the fulfilment of our existence.[62] Tifan is loved by the people and is in the end chosen by them as their new king. Having received his mandate, he accepts that he will be held accountable for his deeds and that he will govern according to fixed laws, containing the rights and duties of both the people and the king.

This brief summary, which hardly does justice to the wealth of ideas conveyed in the text, suffices to situate Wieland's book among the other narratives. First, it is evident in the text that Wieland relates his novel to the work and ideas of the French philosophers and writers, especially Crébillon fils, Montesquieu, and Diderot. However—second—, he parodies them at the same time by fulminating against their apparent *Schwärmerei*, indulging in the imagination, removing all sense of reality, rationality, and truth from their tales. By allowing the miraculous elements to intrude in their plots, they preserve the prejudices and superstitions of the bygone past. In a society based on rational principles, a rational organization of the relationship between the king and his subjects, and a police apparatus to guard the implementation of the system, also comprises an art that conforms to the laws of nature, enjoys freedom of expression, and is not artificial or inauthentic. Only when these conditions are met, can art convey a worldview that will contribute to the welfare of the society.

For the ordering of these ideas—third—Wieland has used the format of the *Thousand and one nights*, which gives him the generic freedom to insert illustrative tales and to create a dialogic setting, open to interruption, comment, deviation, and diversity. It also makes possible the mystification of the philological status of the text as an obscure Oriental chronicle; and it enables him to link his treatise to the figure of the Oriental despot, in his many appearances. His main distinguishing characteristic is that his rule is predominantly projected onto the person of the king, sharpening the contrast that is Wieland's main concern, between arbitrariness and rule according to the laws of nature, the principles of government, and the laws organizing the structure of authority. By juxtaposing sultans with different characters and temperaments, and, importantly, with different educations, Wieland is able to unravel the many aspects of despotism, which is not bound by firmly fixed rules. The king may be a model impersonating the virtues and values of the community; his power should nev-

61 Ibid., 190.

62 Ibid., 195.

ertheless be bound by laws defining his rights and duties, and be embedded in the executive and advisory tasks of the ministers. In this, Wieland's thought resembles that of Montesquieu, as elaborated in his *l'Esprit des lois*: to prevent a monarch from becoming a despot, his power should be mitigated by a system of checks and balances.

The introduction of the Oriental sultan, of course, also enables Wieland to develop a 'neutral' discourse reflecting, as a mirror, the conditions in Europe and criticizing them. Like the exemplary tales in the *Seven viziers* cycle, the narrative provides examples, abstracting a concrete situation by linking it to an imaginary history, thereby enhancing its universal significance and its potential to convince. Within this matrix, two themes are prominent: the first is religion, whose importance for the welfare of the community and for the legitimation of power is repeatedly stressed. On the one hand, religion, conveniently situated in an exotic realm, is presented as originating in superstition, the rather bizarre veneration of the Ape. On the other hand, in its more rational form, religion is depicted as a source of controversy, as a result of too strict and intolerant interpretation, bigotry, and doctrinal appropriation. Finally, it appears as a truthful source of harmony and directives for human demeanour and human relationships, the basic harmony that pervades nature and should pervade society, too, legitimating the corpus of principles and laws.

The second motif, more than familiar by now, is women. Although in the framing story the dramatic intrigue, which is virtually absent, does not hinge on female treachery and fickleness, the treatise itself is permeated with a spirit of masculine rationality, attributing to women, especially, the role of subverting royal authority through their spendthrift ways, desire for luxury and sumptuousness, and their egocentric, pleasure-seeking neglect of general interest. There is no feminine counter-discourse in *Der goldene Spiegel*, as in *Lettres persanes* or *Les bijoux indiscrets*; its misogyny is more reminiscent of the old cycles of the *Seven viziers* type, where women disrupt the regular course of events by seducing the prince to still their own hunger for power. Of course, this stereotype of female evil is counterbalanced by examples of true love, but these women are submissive and their only role is as a symbol of harmony. As of old, rationality is a matter for men.

Finally, the textual setup of *Der goldene Spiegel* reflects the complexities we have encountered in other texts of this type. The narrative is complicated by mystifications and narrative layers and inserted stories. A basic situation of dialogue is created as a framework to explain and exemplify the argument, making possible interruptions, counter-arguments, and insertions. This setup allows Wieland to play with his most fundamental ideas about the role of literature in the spreading of philosophical, rational ideas: although it is a

fictional story, and although it is located in a distant Orient, it is a fierce manifest against *Schwärmerei* and in favour of using literature as a didactic and educational medium. Here, as in so many cases discussed above, the form of the narrative ensures that not only the sultan is educated, but the reader as well.

The Official and His Empress: Alexander Radischev and Catherine II

In its medieval and early modern history, Russia can perhaps best be characterized as an enormous stretch of land in search of a king. Even after the symbiosis of the Romanov dynasty and the Orthodox Church created a kind of power apparatus, government remained superficial and indirect in most parts of the empire, allowing local elites the freedom to organize their estates. This situation changed only when Peter I ascended to the throne in 1682 (until 1696 with his brother Ivan). Unhampered by political experience and insight, the young Tsar embarked upon an ambitious programme of reform, which changed not only Russia's society irreversibly, but also its place within European politics. Peter's project, which was fed by examples from abroad, especially the Dutch Republic, England, and France, is symbolized by his construction of St Petersburg, a new town meant to counterbalance the central position of Moscow as the administrative centre and to provide an outlet to the sea. It illustrates Peter's ambition to transform Russia into a maritime power, venturing into the hazards of overseas trade and building an army guaranteeing its place in international relations of power. In addition, Peter also initiated a thorough reform of social relations and cultural attitudes in Russian society, mainly inspired by European models.

One of Peter's most far-reaching interventions in the social sphere was his issuing of the Table of Ranks in 1722, an effort to change the relationship between the state and the nobility, and the composition of the noble class more generally. Traditionally, members of noble families volunteered in contributing to state services, in the bureaucracy, the army, or the judiciary. Peter's measure obliged every Russian to work in one of the branches of the public institutions and, moreover, opened up the ranks of the noble class for commoners and anyone who through his merits reached a certain rank on the Table. At the same time the titles and the possessions of the noble families could be inherited and the authority of noblemen over their estates became tighter: the peasants were reduced to mere serfs, subjected to the arbitrary control of their masters. In the course of time, these measures resulted in the emergence of a new nobility, consisting of bureaucrats who had risen within the hierarchy of public service,

and to the rapid ruin of the old nobility. It also fostered the deterioration of the position of the peasants, who were not only cruelly exploited but had lost all their rights.

Although the 'old' nobility regained part of its privileges under Peter III, who revoked some of the measures of his predecessor in 1762, it never recovered from the blow of 1722. The decay of the old nobility was deplored by the prominent thinker and historian Mikhail Shcherbatov (1733–1790), who zealously attempted to promote the cause of the old noble families who were now eclipsed by the new nobility. Shcherbatov should be seen as an enlightened intellectual, whose ideas about the organization of the state and society were influenced by the French philosophers, especially Montesquieu. He advocated an authoritarian government consisting of a monarch whose power would be limited by a strong nobility. In the field of religion he adopted a form of deism; laws should be based on Natural Law, and the state should allow a great degree of freedom of expression. These ideas, perhaps showing a strange mixture of conservative and progressive tendencies, were propounded when Shcherbatov became a member of a committee created by Catherine II in 1767 to discuss legal reforms. However, by that time his ideas had become obsolete and anachronistic, and they found no response among the representatives of the new elite.[63]

Perhaps induced by frustration and bitterness about the lack of appreciation for his opinions, Shcherbatov wrote a critical evaluation of the royal dynasties in the last years of his life. The work, entitled *On the corruption of morals in Russia* (1787),[64] he described the ascendancy of the Romanov Tsars and their increasing inclination to luxury and decadent pleasures. Whereas Shcherbatov expresses some admiration for Peter the Great, he condemns the laxity of his successors:

> True attachment to the faith began to disappear, sacraments began to fall into disrepute, resoluteness diminished, yielding place to brazen, aspiring flattery; luxury and voluptuousness laid the foundation of their power, and hence avarice was also aroused, and, to the ruin of the laws and the detriment of the citizens, began to penetrate the law-courts.[65]

63 See M.S. Anderson, *Peter the Great* (London, 1978); Isabel de Madariaga, *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (London and New York, 1998).

64 M.M. Shcherbatov, *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, trans. A. Lentin (Cambridge etc., 1969).

65 Ibid., 153.

The arbitrariness of the emperors and their repression of free speech resulted in a mentality of fear, opportunism, and the pursuit of self-interest:

> The severity of the regime took away from the subjects all courage to express their thoughts, and the grandees became not councillors, but yes-men of the monarch and her favourites, in all cases where they had reason to fear causing displeasure by their contradiction. Patriotism diminished, and selfishness and the desire for rewards increased.[66]

In Shcherbatov's vision there is a clear relationship between the moral conduct of the emperor and the preservation of moral standards in society. Therefore, the moral corruption at the court began to spread to the higher echelons of society, and, through them, to the lower classes, until the whole system of social bonds was disrupted:

> Resoluteness, justice, nobility, moderation, family-loyalty, friendship, loyalty, attachment to religion and civil law—all this disappeared, and its place began to be taken by contempt of duties to God and man, envy, ambition, avarice, ostentation, cunning, servility and flattery, by which everyone proposed to make his fortune and gratify his desires.[67]

In Shcherbatov's description of the process of moral decay, Empress Catherine II, who can be seen as the main figure responsible for the frustration of his ambitions, comes out relatively unscathed. Shcherbatov at first gives a quite generous portrayal of her as a person and as a monarch:

> She is endowed with considerable beauty, clever, affable, magnanimous and compassionate on principle. She loves glory, and is assiduous in her pursuit of it. She is prudent, enterprising, and quite well-read. However, her moral outlook is based on the modern philosophers, that is to say, it is not fixed on the firm rock of God's Law; and hence, being based on arbitrary worldly principles, it is liable to change with them.[68]

Catherine is also endowed with less positive traits, which seem to be associated with her femininity: She is:

66 Ibid., 191.
67 Ibid., 195.
68 Ibid., 235.

> licentious, trusts herself entirely to her favourites, she is full of ostentation in all things, infinitely selfish, and incapable of forcing herself to any matters which may bore her. She takes everything on herself and takes no care to see it carried out, and she is so capricious, that she rarely keeps the same system of government even for a month.[69]

Still, Shcherbatov's overall evaluation of Catherina's government is not completely negative. He praises her favourite Grigory Orlov, who has taken measures against nepotism, sycophancy, and flattery, and who is merciful and objects to extravagant luxury. Catherine's licentiousness and arbitrariness, however, set a bad example for the women and the grandees of the empire; she is engaged with overly ambitious building projects; she betrays her friends; and she has no respect for religion, since she has ordered the translation of works of Voltaire and Marmontel. Shcherbatov concludes his evaluation with a summary of the characteristics of the ideal king: He should be just and moderate, virtuous and assiduous; he should heed the advice of wise men; he should be firm and gentle, live in domestic harmony, avoid licentiousness, delegate tasks, and stimulate patriotism. In Shcherbatov's view of history, the adherence to these virtues by the king, or rather, his internalization of them, will radiate through the whole of society and secure both its social coherence and its mental and material prosperity.

Shcherbatov's assessment of Catherine II is not too distant from her image in historiography. The empress is usually described as intelligent and well read in philosophy and literature. She was especially interested in the French Enlightenment philosophers, and she ordered or encouraged the translation of works by Voltaire, Rousseau, Corneille, Racine, and others. She had a special interest in Diderot and his *Encyclopédie*. When Diderot had difficulty in continuing his ambitious project due to financial strains, Catherine bought his library, which he was allowed to keep, however, and awarded him a yearly stipend. In 1773 she invited him to come to Petersburg to obtain a first-hand impression of the conditions in Russia and to discuss philosophical and political matters with her. She specifically asked him to comment on a draft she wrote in preparation of the legislative committee of 1767, the so-called Nakaz. This text, which contained proposals for new legislation based upon the ideas of Montesquieu and Becarra, was commented upon by Diderot after his departure from Petersburg and seems not to have had any noticeable influence. The Nakaz itself turned out to be not really effective.

---

69 Ibid.

The encounter between Diderot and Catherine is a nice example of a dialogue between a critical observer/philosopher and a monarch as is so often thematized in fictional literature. It shows that Catherine essentially welcomed comment and new ideas, although in her style of government she was unwaveringly autocratic: In the end the discussions left no visible traces. That criticism was not always appreciated by the wilful empress is revealed by her 'dialogue' with another critic, who was treated less graciously than Diderot. Catherine's harsh attitude in this instance was probably inspired by the tumultuous events in France, where, it seemed, the ideas of the *philosophes* had gained sufficient strength to undermine and eventually topple the monarchy. Given her stance as an ardent admirer of French Enlightenment thought, this outcome probably severely shocked Catherine, who then adopted a less flexible attitude. Whatever the case, she would be less than ever inclined to accept Diderot's comment that, ultimately, sovereignty belongs to the people.

The case in question concerned a book written by the intellectual and official Alexander Radishchev (1749–1802) and published in 1790. The book, titled *A journey from St Petersburg to Moscow*, does not have the appearance of a political treatise, let alone of an attack against political stability, and that is probably the reason why it was not noticed by the censor, who let it pass without any comment. It may be that the censor was misled by the text's complex form, since it consists of a framing story relating the journey of the narrator in a post-chaise from St Petersburg to Moscow, and the interruptions at the intermittent post stations along the way, and containing observations, conversations, texts, and comments. In the middle an allegorical tale is inserted, and the book is concluded with an elaborate discussion of poetry in Russia in the age of Enlightenment. Overall, the book gives a rather haphazard impression, although it certainly expresses a clear set of ideas and is permeated by an authentic compassion for Russia, particularly for its lower classes.

Radishchev's class consciousness is made clear immediately at the beginning of the narrative, when the narrator reflects on the measures taken by Peter the Great and his successors to reform society, to the detriment of the old noble families. Rather than deploring the fate of the old nobility, Radishchev draws attention to the consequences of these measures for the condition of the peasants, who have virtually become the property of the estate holders and who have to toil day and night to earn a meagre living. The panoramic view of Russian society presented in *A journey* is conveyed, first, in conversations with other travellers. Shortly after his departure, for instance, the narrator is joined by a friend who tells him of an incident on the northern coast when a ship full of passengers was stranded on the rocks and the responsible officials were unable or simply refused to offer any help. This is an evident example of the

inefficacy and lack of commitment of the Russian officials, who hide their laziness by referring to official regulations or the responsibilities of their superiors. On another occasion, an acquaintance recounts his resignation as a judge, after he was forced by corrupt officials to condemn a refractory peasant, who had turned against his master out of despair. On yet another occasion, the narrator hears the story of an honest man ruined by the decrees of the state, depriving him of his property, honour, and life with the only aim of filling the treasury. Other stories relate to other abuses caused by corruption, arbitrariness, or the impossibility of leading a 'normal' life because of social and economic hardships.

The second textual component through which the narrator conveys ideas is his own experience. First of all, he notices the inefficiency of the Russian means of transport, which is hampered by poor material and lazy functionaries. At the post stations, the narrator has the time to observe the towns and villages through which he passes, recording what he sees. He speaks with a beautiful and lively peasant girl who is unable to marry because of her poverty and witnesses a man who sells his family into serfdom to avoid starvation and a man who sells himself to the army, because any life is preferable to living on an estate as a serf. All these experiences are meant to personally convey and evaluate the effects of the governmental measures on the populace and to illustrate how deeply corruption, arbitrariness, and lack of commitment have penetrated into the society.

The third medium inserted in the frame involves several texts left behind by passengers and found by the narrator. They contain treaties and observations about various fields of political interest. The first text is an essay of a seminarian in support of the freedom of thought and criticizing forms of ignorance, superstition, Spiritism, and mysticism. It criticizes the tendency of philosophers to relinquish their spiritual mission and fall back onto useless superstition:

> It would be useful labor for a writer to show us from former events the progress of the human mind, when it broke through the mist of prejudices and began to pursue truth in its loftiest flights, and when, so to speak, wearied by its vigils, it began once again to abuse its strength, and, gripped by fear, to descend into the mist of prejudice and superstition.[70]

70 Alexander N. Radishchev, *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. Leo Wiener (Cambridge, 1958) 81.

A second document referred to in the text is a chronicle of the town of Novgorod, a city visited by the narrator and ruined by the policies of the Tsar. A third document read and cited by the narrator is a treatise titled 'Project for the future,' which contains an evaluation of the practice of slavery, which is deemed unethical, harmful, and in contradiction to the spirit of the Enlightenment, along with an outline of legislation meant to gradually abolish it. Another part of this treatise is about the position of the nobility, the necessity to work for the public good, and the rewards for meritorious service. It condemns external display, extravagance, and royal pomp. A final essay concerns the history and effects of censorship, which was invented by the clergy 'for the perpetuation of ignorance', but which is now still maintained in enlightened times in the name of reason, science, and truth, as a protection against error.[71] Religious and political censorship are criticized: 'Who can be a judge in an offense against the Eternal Father? The real offender against God is he who imagines that he can sit in judgement on an offense against Him.'[72] And: A throne based on honesty has no reason to fear the truth.[73]

Finally, the fourth textual insertion is an allegorical story, which covers roughly one third of the text, illustrating the delusions and illusions of power, and indicting the excessive display of royal authority, which allows a mentality of servility and hypocrisy to flourish. The story is presented as dream, in which the narrator sees himself as

> a tsar, shah, khan, king, bey, nabob, sultan, or some such exalted being, sitting on a throne in power and majesty. My throne was of pure gold and, cleverly set with varicolored precious stones, it shone resplendent. Nothing could compare with the luster of my raiment. My head was crowned with a laurel wreath. Around me lay the regalia of my power. Here lay a sword on a column wrought of silver, on which were represented battles at sea and on land, the capture of cities, and other triumphs of this sort; everywhere my name could be seen on high, borne by the Genius of glory, who was hovering over all these exploits. Here one could see my sceptre resting upon sheaves heavy with abundant ears of grain, wrought of pure gold and perfectly imitating nature. A pair of scales hung from a rigid beam. In one of the scales lay a book with the inscription 'The Law of Mercy'; in the other likewise there was a book with the inscription 'The

71 Ibid., 181.

72 Ibid., 168.

73 Ibid., 169.

> Law of Conscience'. The orb was carved from a single stone and was supported by a circlet of cherubim sculptured in white marble. My crown was raised above everything else and rested on the shoulders of a mighty giant, and its rim was supported by Truth. A serpent of enormous size, forged of gleaming steel, wound all about the foot of my throne and, holding the tip of its tail in its jaws, represented eternity.[74]

The crowd of officials and courtiers who surround him respond to his smallest whim, saddening when he frowns and expressing joy when he smiles. He is praised by all, as a clement, wise, and just ruler, who has subdued the enemies of the empire and secured the livelihood of the people. His armies are victorious, his ships cross the seas in all directions, and magnificent buildings are erected. However, amidst the crowd stands an old, blind woman, who is known as a witch and is called Clear-of-Eye. The narrator/king is intrigued by her, and she tells him that she is a pilgrim who is able to reveal the truth to him: 'Thou hast been blind, stone blind. I am Truth.'[75] She removes a thick film from his eyes, and now he is able to see things in their true form: 'Thou shalt see into the heart of things.'[76] He is able to see the hypocrisy of those before him, who pretend to be his loyal friends, but in fact are his mortal enemies.

In contrast, she, the pilgrim, should be trusted and honoured:

> Never be afraid of my voice. If from the midst of the people there arise a man who criticizes thy acts, know that he is thy true friend. With no hope of reward, with no servile trembling, with a sturdy voice he will proclaim me to thee. Beware and do not dare put him to death as a rebel. Call him to thee, be hospitable to him as to a pilgrim. For everyone who criticizes the Sovereign in the fullness of his autocratic power is a pilgrim in the land where all tremble before him. Treat him well, so that he may return and tell thee ever more truth.[77]

She hands him a magical ring that will warn him if he commits an injustice, since after all he possesses absolute power over the lives of his subjects:

> For know that thou hast it in thy power to be the greatest murderer in the commonweal, the greatest robber, the greatest traitor, the greatest

74 Ibid., 66–67.
75 Ibid., 71.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid., 72.

> violator of the public peace, a most savage enemy who turns his malice against the lives of the weak. Thine is the blame if a mother lament for her son, or a wife for her husband, killed on the field of battle, for the danger of being subjected to a conqueror's yoke hardly justifies the murder called war. Thine the blame if the field be deserted, if the peasant's little ones starve at their mother's breast, withering from lack of food.[78]

While listening to her, the narrator feels a sense of joy and peace coming over him, but soon he sees himself in a different guise:

> My glittering garments seemed to be stained with blood and drenched with tears. On my fingers I saw fragments of human brains; my feet were standing in slime. He people around me looked still more odious. They seemed all blackened and seared within by the dark flame of greed. At me and at one another they threw fierce looks full of rapacity, envy, sly cunning, and hate.[79]

All his commanders and officials show their real nature, and he discovers that all his measures have had an adverse effect. Subsidies were appropriated by the rich or misspent; negligence and corruption are rampant; hypocrisy and opportunism reign; the economy is ruined; buildings are tasteless; government money is being wasted:

> How sad it was to see that my generosity poured more wealth upon the rich, the flatterer, the false friend, the murderer, sometimes indeed the secret murderer, the traitor and violator of public trust, the clever sycophant who knew my desires and pandered to my weaknesses, the woman who gloried in her shamelessness.[80]

Realizing the deceit of his ministers, even his wife, 'who sought in my love satisfaction only for her vanity and who sought to please me only with her outward appearance, while her heart felt only loathing for me,'[81] he summons them to account for themselves. He suddenly becomes aware of his own position: 'I saw afresh the responsibility of my high office, recognized the vastness of my duty, and understood whence proceeded my right and my power. I trembled

78 Ibid., 72–73.
79 Ibid., 73.
80 Ibid., 75.
81 Ibid., 76.

inwardly and was terrified by the responsibility of my stewardship.'[82] After he has woken up, there is no ring on his finger. He admonishes the kings of the world: 'Ruler of the world, if, when you read my dream, you smile scornfully or knit your brow, know that the pilgrim whom I saw has flown far away from you and disdains your palace.'[83]

The allegory of the metamorphosis of the mighty king is the most forceful and central component of the mosaic of vignettes containing the various elements of Radishchev's critique. It is directed immediately—albeit in a dream—at the sovereign, who is attacked not for her injustice or bad intentions, but rather for her blindness and weakness. Because of the splendour that surrounds her and the flatterers obstructing her view, she is unable to judge the real effects of her policies, seeing instead the false picture held up to her by her ministers. It is power as a construction of externalities instead of an acknowledgement of responsibility that is condemned as ultimately destructive for the whole society. Only an honest effort to confront the real situation of the people will break the spell, unmask traitors, and prepare the way for genuine improvement. If there was any doubt about Radishchev's intentions with this 'fairy tale', he removes it by seemingly addressing the empress directly with an appeal to heed his observations.

These formal elements produce a narrative that is particularly effective in its criticism, precisely because of the combination of realistic, documentary, and clearly fictional components. The trope of the journey allows the author to give a panoramic view of Russia in its provincial simplicity, going in search of the 'real' Russia, imbued with the Russian soul, and in harmony with the 'musical inclination of the people'.[84] The narrator identifies himself with the authentic Russians and notices their distance from the centres of power and their subordination to exploitative and repressive laws and socio-economic structures. The narrator has left his familiar, elite surroundings to explore the conditions of the people, as a king in disguise, or a prince at his initiation, to heal his blindness in a dialogue with people who directly experience injustice and corruption. His main concern is the situation of the peasants, which is an affront to any 'enlightened' view of society and humankind. By discovering and disclosing the reality of Russian life, he acts as a medium of initiation, both for himself and for the empress, and, of course, ultimately for the reader. The various aspects of this initiation are beautifully integrated by the central piece, the fictional *démasqué* of kingship.

82 Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., 43.

We, looking back from our vantage point, are fortunate that Catherine herself not only read Radishchev's book, but also recorded her opinion. In her commentary notes, she wonders how it was possible that the book passed the censor unnoticed and states: 'The purpose of the book is clear on every page: its author, infected and full of the French madness, is trying in every possible way to break down respect for authority and for the authorities, to stir up in the people indignation against their superiors and against the government.'[85] She suspects that the author has failed to get entrance to the palace and, ungrateful, tries to 'struggle for it with the pen'.[86] The allegorical tale is rejected as being 'full of abuse, invective, and an evil-minded interpretation of things'.[87] The book 'advocates principles which are completely destructive of the laws and which have turned France upside down.'[88] And: 'It is drawn from sundry semi-sophists of the present time, such as Rousseau, the Abbé Raynal, and similar hypochondriacs, but in metaphysics he is a Martinist.'[89] The book is 'revolutionary', and has 'a criminal intent.'[90] It is particularly irreconcilable with religion: '[It is clear] throughout his whole book that the author has little respect for the Christian teaching and that he has adopted, instead, certain ideas which are not in conformity with the Christian and civil law.'[91] The author has 'no respect for the divine and civil laws', but rather has 'a preference for arbitrary, quasi-philosophical raving'.[92] The author is denounced as 'unbridled', endowed with 'unbounded ambition', 'impatient', an 'egotist', and 'not a true Christian', possessed of a 'malicious bent of mind'.[93]

In the end Catherine wonders whether the author has written more books, because this one has appeared anonymously. She has to admit that the author 'has learning enough, and has read many books,' but 'he has a melancholy temperament and sees everything in a very somber light; consequently he takes a bilious black and yellow view of things.'[94] Catherine had no difficulty in finding out the identity of the author. Showing some clemency, she commanded: 'Tell the author that I have read his book from cover to cover, and that in the

85 Ibid., 239.
86 Ibid., 240.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid., 243.
89 Ibid., 244.
90 Ibid., 248.
91 Ibid., 244.
92 Ibid., 245.
93 Ibid., 239, 244.
94 Ibid., 239.

course of reading it I have come to wonder whether I may in some way have offended him. For I do not want to judge him without hearing him, although he judges sovereigns without hearing their justification.'[95] On second thought, however, she was less considerate. Radishchev was arrested and condemned to death. On the intervention of his friends the verdict was converted to forced exile. Radishchev remained in Siberia until 1796, when Catherine's successor Paul pardoned him and allowed him to return. Although he was rehabilitated and allowed to resume his life, in his desperation he committed suicide in 1802.

Concluding Remarks

The difference between the narratives discussed in this chapter and those analysed in the previous ones is, first of all, that whereas the latter are meant to facilitate the discursive embedding of power structures in society, the former tend to question this embedding and try to problematize the relationship between the community and its king. Although the texts, by consequence, are not part of 'court discourse', they are not particularly of a 'popular' kind either, although it can be asked what 'popular' should mean in this context. Most of the texts are rather sophisticated and philosophical, both in form and in contents, but most of them were widely read by the public. It can be argued that by the time of their publication—app. 1600–1800—a shift had occurred in the nature of the audience, due to the invention of print, new channels for distribution, the spread of literacy, and, at least in some cases, a cultural climate favourable for the promulgation of literature. It can be argued, therefore, that although the works represent a certain intellectual level, they had an impact in social circles that contributed to the formation of non-governmental discourses of power.

What binds the various kinds of narratives, in the different categories is that they all seem to examine the nature of power and authority in order to define universal concepts of the relationship between kings and their communities. However, the orientations of these examinations seem to be different; whereas the previous chapters deal with texts meant to incorporate values to legitimate a certain *status quo*, without uncritically accepting specific historical situations, and preserving traditional values within new contexts, the texts in this chapter seem to respond more directly to the historical circumstances in which they appeared, addressing abuses and proposing ideas for change. Whereas

95 Ibid., 248.

most texts in the previous chapters tend to propagate a form of despotic rule, based on traditional and religious frameworks, most texts in this chapter tend to question absolute rule, or at least try to find new structures that could mitigate its consequences. Still, what is remarkably persistent is, first, the composite nature of power and authority; second, the inculcation of moral values in the ruler as the personification of the social order, and, third, the potentially subversive role of women. As before, we perceive the tension between kingship as a neutral institution anchoring a form of power, and kingship as the manifestation of an individual character, acting as a model of moral propriety whose conduct pervades society as a whole.

In the European texts we find a remarkable fascination with Oriental material and examples. As explained above, this is partly caused by the appearance of the *Thousand and one nights*, which provided examples of fictionalizing an Oriental 'reality'. By the eighteenth century, the Orient was no longer a distant, mythical realm, but a reality in which Europeans could mirror themselves. The Orient, moreover, was a neutral sphere where ideas and hypotheses could be tested without directly involving the interests of European parties and participants in the debates. In this sense, it partly replaced the exemplary function of Classical Antiquity. The influence of the *Thousand and one nights* suggests that in the eighteenth century we witness the completion of a trajectory, in which narrative material migrated from east to west, or possibly from centre to east and west, within the Eurasian realm. The *Thousand and one nights* functioned as a medium for conveying eastern themes, motifs, forms, and concepts both within and between cultural networks. The incorporation and adaptation of *Thousand and one nights* material in European literature reflects a new and final effort to tap the infinite riches of the Oriental reservoir of storytelling.

The narratives analysed in this chapter also distinguish themselves through a different kind of hybridity. Whereas previous texts are generally accommodating to generic conventions, the texts in this chapter show a remarkable sense of experimentation and discursive complexity, as if the act of criticism is difficult to reconcile with conventional literary forms. This inclination to experiment is especially visible in the European texts, which show a strong sense of generic destabilization, parody, and innovation. This tendency cannot be dissociated from the processes described above, the historical conjuncture and the Orientalist imperative. First, while in the Middle Ages the world consisted of a more or less coherent domain of the Self, constructed on a common vision of reality, the Orient was a domain subjected to a quite different regime of reality; the world was principally heterogeneous consisting of a juxtaposition of different, separated realms. In the eighteenth century this worldview had been replaced by a new, homogeneous view of reality: the whole world was governed by the

same natural laws; reality was essentially the same everywhere; and all societies were part of a single human history. This shift in the coherence of reality resulted in a discursive split: Otherness could no longer be captured in separated regimes of reality, but had to be integrated by adopting various layers within discursive formations, incorporating different manifestations of a single reality into texts. To make this possible, the coherence of texts had to be deconstructed and reconstructed to allow for a more complex relationship between text and reality.

Second, the intensified encounter with the Orient and its narrative material necessitated a process of incorporation in which traditional literary forms were adapted to new circumstances and new literary forms were taken over and assimilated. This implied a re-ordering of the literary field, experimenting with combining old and familiar genres with new, exotic ones in order to redefine generic boundaries and create new literary forms that would reflect new attitudes to both the world outside and the redefinition of Europe's self-image. While in the Middle Ages rather well-defined generic conventions reflected a relatively simple worldview, in the eighteenth century new, more complex forms had to be invented in which external influences were combined with an authentic European voice. This is not to say that this process was unique for the European situation; it can probably be argued that a similar process occurred in China as well, during the literary renaissance from the seventeenth century onwards.

Finally, this chapter presents a number of self-volunteering sages, who imagine themselves in the position of the traditional vizier or minister, advising the king and warning against the delusions of power and moral disintegration. In previous texts the position of critics of the monarch is usually attributed to legendary heroes and sages, whose moral integrity is beyond doubt and whose position is invulnerable and unassailable because of their legendary status. The examples of these texts show, in a metanarrational manner, that such sages also emerged in real history and that they had the courage to speak their minds. At least in one case a real dialogic situation was established, albeit to the detriment of the 'sage'. Every once in a while fictional situations can be transposed to reality.

Conclusion

One of the most important caveats issued in our Introduction is the acknowledgement that we can say very little about literary influences and patterns of transmission as long as we lack sufficient knowledge of the historical frameworks by which they are structured. Of course, if we perceive clear similarities and parallels between texts, we can speculate about potential relationships, but we have to keep in mind that a mere comparison cannot yield definitive conclusions and that we require insight into processes of interaction and exchange. The *Thousand and one nights* is a case in point, because it exemplifies how narrative material can be transmitted along several trajectories and coalesce into a more or less vaguely defined corpus, which acquires a separate status and thereby not only structures the visibility of the material in history, but also provides it with new impulses for further proliferation and re-evaluation. We are able to track the traces of these trajectories; we can speculate about the ways in which narrative material was adapted and transmitted; we can conceive theoretical models for cultural and literary interaction and change; but we will still need more precise information before we can clearly situate the evolution of the *Thousand and one nights* in an explicative framework.

Even if we take this limitation into account, it is possible to study narratives from different cultural realms and compare their structural and narrative characteristics. The aim is not to find some 'archetypal' essences, because it must be clear that all texts are situated in historical contexts, even if it seems that their intention is implicitly or explicitly to transcend a specific historical situation and preserve narrative material, concepts, and values for posterity. After all, literature is among the mechanisms that regulate the preservation, accommodation, and storing of ideas, at the same time recording historical change and defying it, by being accumulated in the collective imagination. It is this function that links it to other social and political institutions that structure the control of processes of change over time and that can regulate balances between preservation and innovation. However, as we argued in the Introduction, the development and proliferation of literature, and culture more generally, are not completely congruent with the history of political institutions and boundaries.

If we look at the material discussed in this study we can, by way of conclusion, compare their forms and contents within several frameworks, focusing on their textual, conceptual, and functional characteristics, on their themes and motifs, and, finally, on processes of exchange and transmission. In discussing the narratives within these frameworks we should always be aware that they are conceived and operate within structures of power and authority, especially

© RICHARD VAN LEEUWEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004340541_009
This is an open access chapter distributed under the terms of the CC-BY-NC-ND License.

in the case of works that implicitly or explicitly deal with questions concerning the legitimacy of kings and the principles of kingship. If the texts we selected do not openly or deliberately represent a court perspective, reflecting the interests of the prince only, they are not unambiguously 'popular' either. Most of the texts show kinds of hybridity that seem to bridge the gap between these two domains, and it is probably precisely from this hybridity that they derive their discursive/ideological function, impregnating the collective imagination with values that consolidate structures of power. It is remarkable that in the last two centuries of the period under study, from 1600 to 1800, we see a tendency towards a more critical assessment of the principles and functioning of power structures and kings, directing attention not only to the 'eternal' values embraced by a community and personified by the 'prince', but also to the relationship between authority and social organization. This occurred in the various cultural domains, albeit not everywhere to the same extent.

If we look at the textual aspects of the narratives studied here, we can discern two generic domains; first, the mirror-for-princes type, ranging from cycles of stories illustrating the principles of government to critical comments on the political situation; and, second, the romances in their different forms, ranging from chivalric romances to love romances and the novel. In both these domains elements of non-fiction/realism/reality are combined with fictional elements, and, significantly, forms of emplotment, a narrative strategy that disrupts monolithic discourses and imposes a form of re-evaluation, but also generates a play between specific situations and universal concepts; between a specific incident, involving 'real' persons, and transcendental, communal, or transhistorical values. A discursive split is enforced that installs various forms of dialogue and dialogic situations that recompose the discursive domain. It is our argument that these strategies are not merely narrative techniques, but that they are essential features of these kinds of discourses of kingship: they reveal the composite nature of kingship and they integrate elements belonging to the discourse of power, on the one hand, and the social imagination, on the other hand, enabling them to function as narratives legitimating kingship and certain forms of authority. In the more complex texts, especially the later, more critical, ones, this strategy sometimes results in more radical fragmentation, forms of self-reflexivity, and a questioning of the relationship between texts and reality. Of course, this, too, has a great impact on the functioning of discourses of authority. The central textual strategy, in this process, is narration, in its various, contingent, forms.

If textual aspects are revealing about the embedding of discourses of kingship and power in society, the conceptual aspects also play an important role. A recurrent concept in most of the texts is history, in both its 'realistic' and

'mythical' versions. History is the repository of markers of identity and moral and cultural values, usually projected on specific figures, and serves as a source of legitimacy for kings and systems of authority. It provides examples of periods of glory and catastrophe, of harmony and war. It also provides opportunities for fictionalization, abstraction, and interpretations, the construction of symbols, fostering the links between the power configuration and the collective imagination. The main aim of referring to all these aspects of history is to create a sense of community. The preservation of old traditions, old customs, and old values is mostly seen as of vital significance for the preservation of society and its cultural ideals. Disruptions and discontinuities are usually considered catastrophic. This is not always the case, of course, for example when the spread of Islam heralds a new era. But even in such cases an appeal to the symbolic capital accumulated through history is made to prevent a complete break, and often the 'old order' is depicted as a deviation from the proper course of history, which is restored by a new movement. In this way crises are countered by a depiction of continuity and a re-mobilization of moral principles through narration.

Historical claims often coincide with religion, a second conceptual element buttressing structures of power and their concomitant discourses. Religion is incorporated into the narratives in various ways, as a more or less self-evident moral framework, as a driving force motivating the story as a whole, as the main element in the plot, or as a force intervening in the personal lives of the heroes or the vicissitudes of the community. Religion provides an underlying system of symbols and rituals, values and justifications, identity markers and self-definitions. As in the case of history, religious elements can be used to convey interactions between supernatural realms and reality, between communal experiences and their interpretation, between real figures and their value as exemplary symbols. They structure the cultural imagination by demarcating truth and falsity, faith and superstition, miracles and magic. Religion stands for harmony, justice, and a stable order, whereas superstitions reflect particular interests, deceitful interventions, and disorderly and arbitrary rule. In most cases, one of the legitimizing factors of kings is that they are able to subdue these irregular forces in the name of the true faith, or that they have access to the esoteric repositories of knowledge that buttress claims to power.

Religion and history are, therefore, systems contributing to the delimitation of communal and cultural domains. Together with language and literature they create a sense of commonality, which is an important support for kingship and authority. When one of them is lacking, for some reason, the other is more forcefully invoked, for instance in the case of the romance of Sayyid Batthal, where historical justification is replaced by an—a-historical—claim

to religious legitimacy. The discursive strength of the narratives we have analysed lies in their capacity to integrate these elements by linking them to a single intrigue within a fictional framework, thereby processing them as a basis for common identification. This implies, conversely, the identification of external Others, who have a different religion, a different history, and their own cultural symbols. Many of the narratives under discussion contribute to the formation of realms in which 'enemies' of various kinds are subdued, either in the shape of treacherous viziers, or in the guise of magicians, demons, fire-worshippers, or usurpers of the throne. They are, ultimately, intended to construct a civilizational *doxa* that serves as the basis of a sense of social harmony combined with a structure of authority.

The combination of religious and historical elements, therefore, makes possible the functioning of the texts as media to construct discourses of authority, providing legitimacy, endowing the 'prince' with charisma, demarcating cultural and social identities, and preserving communal symbols. They are conceived to be stored in the collective imagination by, first, suggesting an interruption of a stable order and, second, restoring the regular course of history by revitalizing the energies hoarded in the historical-religious complex. There are two fundamental constituents that facilitate this process: the first is rationality, which recurs time and again as the main principle on which not only proper rule but even the existence of civilization is built. Rationality is opposed, as a rule, to emotions, errors, superstition, and arbitrariness, which have to be countered by a hero and a prince who possesses extraordinary powers. Rationality is mobilized in various forms ranging from efforts to construct pure, objective reasoning to princely characters combining rational objectivity with an aesthetic sensitivity, as a more or less holistic amalgamation of moral and aesthetic ideals. Moreover, rationality is problematized in various ways, not only by juxtaposing it with impulsiveness and emotional incontinence; it is also at the core of the tension between the institution of kingship as part of a cosmic order and the 'contingent' impersonation of it by a specific king in a specific situation.

The tension between personal and institutional manifestations of kingship is relevant as well for the second constituent of the mobilization of the principles of kingship: morality. If there is one element that recurs in all texts analysed above as the main component of kingship, it is moral integrity. Kingship, as an institution, is part of a universal order erected on the foundation of morality, as a system of values that becomes manifest in religion and history. In order to function properly this institution should be identified with a 'prince' who himself is imbued with the morality of the system of which he is a part. The king is, so to speak, the link between the moral system and society. If he is unable to enact the morality imposed on him by the institution of kingship,

because his character is inclined to debauchery, corruption, injustice, or violence, his behaviour will spread in all layers of society, because he, as a model linked to the institution, embodies the moral integrity of the community. It is here that the tension between the institution of kingship and the person of the king surfaces: The king derives his power from the institution of kingship, but he has to exercise it according to his character and judgement. He has to internalize a power that transcends him, while at the same time effectuating it as an individual person. This results in what can be called the paradox of kingship: because he is all-powerful, it is incumbent on a king to impose his power, but the imposition of institutional power is not always reconcilable with the nature of individual kings or individual cases; therefore, while the king is in principle despotic, his power has to be balanced by the counsel of ministers and sages, who render the power of the king compatible with the exigencies of society. This dialogical search for morality can be perceived from the *Seven viziers* to the contestations of Alexander Radishchev.

All these textual, conceptual, and functional elements and procedures require sets of themes and motifs in order to become effective within fictional narratives. Motifs that frequently recur are figures such as the righteous and the vicious ministers, the visionary, the unbeliever, the hypocrite, the traitor, the demon, the king in disguise, the loyal friend, etc. Together, figures such as these represent the warp and weft of the intrigue, as personifications of specific values, or as vehicles of narrative events and narrative turns, integrating concepts and ideas into the tissue of the story. As we have seen, a universal motif instigating fictional intrigues is the relationship between man and woman, in its two conventional forms of love and adultery. This motif serves to break continuities and mend discontinuities, to display universal emotions, social conventions, and moral interpretations and relate them to discourses of power and authority. Of course, the complex of motifs connected with love and its intricacies are entrenched in the social imagination to such an extent that they can be imagined as small, personal incidents that can have huge repercussions. They can disrupt the harmony between a king and his kingship or between the king and his people. Virtually all narratives analysed in the chapters above are essentially misogynous, attributing to women an excessive subjectivity that perpetually threatens to undermine the order of civilization. Still, this fear is inspired mainly by the enormous power ascribed to women because of both their irresistible beauty and their indispensability for procreation and, therefore, for the continuation of dynasties.

When the various motifs are put together to form a coherent narrative, we can perceive a dominant theme, which is, for almost all texts, the phenomenon of initiation. This initiation is most often associated with the motifs of love and

sexuality and the motif of displacement, in its manifold manifestations, from imprisonment to endless peregrinations, from journeys through the realms of the jinns to journeys through eighteenth-century Russia, from confinement in a harem to a forced stay on an enchanted island in the Mediterranean. In order to construct a fictional plot, some order has to be broken, and this can be achieved by disrupting the equilibrium of time and space in a pre-established order. The hero or the prince has to set out on an adventurous journey; he has to encounter foes and conquer his beloved; he has to learn the difference between illusion and reality, between deceit and loyalty; he has to gain knowledge of the secret forces governing the universe and to defeat the advocates of disbelief; he has to prove his prowess, his virtuousness, and his compatibility with cosmic harmony; he has to visit underworlds and heavens; and, especially, he has to become acquainted with the secrets of love. In most texts the fictional emplotment opens up a journey of discovery, often combined with or in the form of a dialogical setting in which the hero or prince is prepared for assuming his role in the ideal structure of power. In the meantime, the narrator makes sure that the reader, too, is properly informed. Reading the narratives repeats the ritual that is narrated in the text: the passing through a liminal period to be instructed about the nature of true kingship.

After summarizing these common elements, we now arrive at the more difficult point where parallels should be judged and relationships reconstructed. One of the characteristics that most of the narratives of kingship have in common is that they are not related to specific kings in specific, realistic, historical settings, but are rather concerned with prototypes of kings, either completely abstract, or modelled on legendary or historical figures. This methodological abstraction dissociates them from the most immediate political frameworks, although, as we have seen, these frameworks can be important for their purport, their preservation, and their adaptation across historical periods. In general, the texts are meant to record values rather than ideologies, and therefore straddle the cultural and political domains. Political circumstances can produce possibilities for exchange, however, stimulating the migration of narrative material across political, cultural, and linguistic boundaries. In our texts we can perceive glimmerings of these processes, such as the proliferation of the *Seven viziers* cycles, or the recycling of narrative structures and motifs within the Islamicate realms, the omnipresence of the form of the chivalric romance, the adoption of Islamic concepts by the Turkic peoples, the spread of Persian narrative material in the Arabic and Turkish realms, Buddhist elements in Chinese romances, and, finally, the incorporation of Oriental material in European literature and thought. It remains to be seen if these sub-trajectories can at some point be mapped as currents and confluences in a single sea. It is clear that

all these literary domains with respect to narratives of kingship show remarkable similarities, in genres, themes, and functions. It is perhaps their lack of historical situatedness that allows them to transcend political boundaries and proliferate within the cultural realm relatively uninhibitedly.

As noted in the Introduction, the *Thousand and one nights* can serve as a kind of matrix not only for this study, but also for the mapping of these trajectories, in the sense that it comprises the various concerns that have occupied us in the previous chapters. The work not only contains much material that fits the criteria for the selection made for this study; it also illustrates how literary material can coalesce within changing literary networks and fields to form new centres of proliferation and to fulfil the function of literature as a container of cultural symbols and ideas within changing political and historical circumstances. The work itself preserves material adapted from previous (or contemporaneous?) narratives and functions as a reservoir of material repeatedly recycled even up the present day, laying bare a trajectory from ancient Mesopotamia to late medieval Persia and South Asia to modern, even twenty-first-century, Europe. It is interesting to see not only how the material migrated, but also what has been lost and gained on the way. The structure of the frame story has proven to be a persistent narrative technique that has opened up a rich palette of visions of the nature of narratives and texts, and the function of narration. Some motifs have resisted the impact of time, or even profited from it, and Shahrazad's strategy of postponing gratification to save her life has remained an essential metaphor for the act of writing until the present day.

In spite of these influential properties, it is still uncertain how we should evaluate the significance of the work. Shall time reveal the *Thousand and one nights* as a monument of world literature that will withstand the assaults of time and continue to symbolize the meaning of literature? Will it be seen as a work whose meaning and significance are the result of a common effort by innumerable writers and storytellers from Asia, the Middle East, and Europe? Or will it be considered as an incident in literary history, a more or less coincidental agglomeration of narrative material that acquired fame only because it appeared at a certain juncture in history, when Europe needed the influx of new inspiration from the East to realize its own ascendancy in history? It is not unlikely that it will retain its interest not because of its intrinsic literary value, but because of its influence and the ways in which it succeeded in having itself re-invented as a literary and cultural phenomenon. The importance of the work itself may be limited to a certain time and space, but its impact may reverberate over centuries, merely because it seems to represent and exemplify the essential nature of literature.

For our purpose here, there is an additional, interesting aspect of the *Thousand and one nights*. In the framing story it is shown how the generation of literature is connected with configurations of power. In that sense it represents a kind of primordial form of narratives of kingship. An almost omnipotent king, endowed with all the paraphernalia of his masculine power, discovers that he is betrayed by his wife. To prevent the collapse of the system of power, invested in his person as a royal 'body', he dismisses the feminine element from his life as much as he can. Seeing that this regime of violence will lead to the ruin of the empire and the extinction of humanity, Shahrazad decides to intervene. She conceives the only feasible strategy to change Shahriyar's fatal course: She encapsulates him, his body, and his symbolic stature in a web of stories, which transforms his relapse in the mere exertion of power into an acceptable, revitalizing form of authority, thereby securing the king's reconciliation with the feminine element, avoiding the end of the dynasty, and saving society from the destructive cycle of death. As we have argued elsewhere, this intrigue copies the framework—and emplotment—of the type of the mirror-for-princes in Arabic and Persian literature, but it has inverted the procedure: Here it is the female element that causes the tragic disruption and Shahriyar's impulsive response, but it is also a woman who cures the king's aberrant mind and restores a sense of rationality, which in the end brings back order in the empire. In literature of this kind women are necessary to disrupt the regular course of events, including its discourses of power, and, apparently, to restore the regular course of events as well, by their dialogic potential and their crucial role in the continuation of—male-dominated—socio-political orders. Perhaps this is the basic message that these wide-ranging narratives of kingship from the Eurasian realm have in common.

Bibliography

A Plain and Literal Translation of the Arabian Nights Entertainments, Now Entituled The Book of The Thousand Nights and a Night, trans. Richard Burton, 10 vols. (s.l., s.d., [Burton Club, 1905?]).

Ahmad, Aziz, *Studies in Islamic Culture in the Indian Environment* (Oxford, 1964).

Aigle, Denise, *The Mongol Empire Between Myth and Reality: Studies in Anthropological History* (Leiden and Boston, 2014).

al-Azmeh, Aziz, *Muslim Kingship: Power and the Sacred in Muslim, Christian and Pagan Polities* (London and New York, 1997).

Ali, Mustafa bin Ahmet, *Mustafa Ali's Counsel for Sultans: Edition, Translation, Notes*, Andreas Tietze, ed., 2 vols. (Vienna, 1979–1982).

Anderson, M.S., *Peter the Great* (London, 1978).

Anooshahr, Ali, 'On the Imperial Discourse of the Delhi Sultanate and Early Mughal India', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 7, no. 2 (2014) 157–176.

App, Urs, *The Birth of Orientalism* (Oxford, 2010).

Aravamudan, Srinivas, *Enlightenment Orientalism: Resisting the Rise of the Novel* (Chicago and London, 2012).

Arjomand, Saïd Amir, 'Unity of the Persianate World under Turko-Mongolian Domination and Divergent Development of Imperial Autocracies in the Sixteenth Century', *Journal of Persianate Studies* 9, no. 1 (2016) 1–18.

Behl, Aditya, *Love's Subtle Magic. An Indian Islamic Literary Tradition, 1379–1545*, Wendy Doniger, ed. (Oxford, 2012).

Bellino, Francesca, 'Tamim al-Dari the Intrepid Traveller: Emergence, Growth and Making of a Legend in Arabic Literature', *Oriente Moderno* 89, no. 2 (2009) 197–225.

Blatherwick, Helen, *Prophets, Gods and Kings in* Sīrat Sayf ibn Dhī Yazan*: An Intertextual Reading of an Egyptian Popular Epic* (Leiden and Boston, 2016).

Braginsky, Vladimir, *The Turkic-Turkish Theme in Traditional Malay Literature. Imagining the Other to Empower the Self* (Leiden and Boston, 2015).

Brummett, Palmira, *Mapping the Ottomans: Sovereignty, Territory, and Identity in the Early Modern Mediterranean* (New York, 2015).

Campbell, Killis, *The Seven Sages of Rome, edited from the Manuscripts, with Introduction, Notes, and Glossary* (Forgotten Books, 2012 [1907]).

Caylus, Comte de, 'Histoire de Bedihuldgemal; fille du roi des esprits, et de Seifulmulouck; fils du roi d'Égypte', in: *Œuvres badines complettes du Comte de Caylus*, vol. 7 (Amsterdam and Paris, 1787) 192–265.

Caylus, Comte de, *Contes*, Julie Bloch, ed., Bibliothèque des Génies et de Fées, vol. 12 (Paris, 2005).

Cazotte, Jacques, *La Suite des Mille et une Nuits*, Raymonde Robert, ed., Bibliothèque des Génies et de Fées, vol. 10 (Paris, 2012).

Chaudhuri, K.N., *Trade and Civilisation in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, 1985).

Chauvin, Victor, *Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes ou relatifs aux arabes*, vol. 7 (Liège and Leipzig, 1903).

Chraïbi, Aboubakr, ed., *Arabic Manuscripts of the* Thousand and One Nights*: Presentation and Critical Editions of Four Noteworthy Texts. Observations on Some Osmanli Translations* (Paris, 2016).

Clardy, Jesse V., *The Philosophical Ideas of Alexander Radishchev* (London, 1963).

Contadini, Anna, and Claire Norton, eds., *The Renaissance and the Ottoman world* (Farnham, 2013).

Creation of the Gods, trans. Gu Zhizhong, 2 vols. (Beijing, 1992).

Darwin, John, *After Tamerlane: The Rise and Fall of Global Empires, 1400–2000* (London etc., 2008).

Das Gupta, Ashin, *The World of the Indian Ocean Merchant, 1500–1800: Collected Essays of Ashin Das Gupta*, compiled by Uma Das Gupta (New Delphi, 2004).

De Bary, William Theodore, trans., *Waiting for the Dawn: A Plan for the Prince: Huang Tsung-hsi's Ming-i tai-fang lu* (New York, 1993).

Dew, Nicholas, *Orientalism in Louis XIV's France* (Oxford etc., 2009).

Diderot, Denis, *Les bijoux indiscrets*, in: *Oeuvres de Diderot*, André Billy, ed. (Paris, 1951).

Die Fahrten des Sajjid Batthal. Ein alttürkischer Volks- und Sittenroman, trans. Hermann Ethé, 2 vols. (Leipzig, 1871).

Die Geschichte von Hang Tuah. Eine Erzählung aus dem 16. Jahrhundert über den malaiischen Volkshelden, trans. Hans Overbeck (Leipzig and Weimar, 1986).

Doufikar-Aerts, Faustina, *Alexander Magnus Arabicus: A Survey of the Alexander Tradition Through Seven Centuries: From Pseudo-Callisthenes to Suri* (Paris etc., 2010).

Douthwaite, Julia V., *Exotic Women: Literary Heroines and Cultural Strategies in Ancien Régime France* (Philadelphia, 1992).

Dufrenoy, Marie-Louise, *L'Orient romanesque en France (1704–1789)*, 3 vols. (Montreal and Amsterdam, 1946–1975).

Ernst, Carl W., 'Muslim Studies of Hinduism? A Reconsideration of Arabic and Persian Translations from Indian Languages', *Iranian studies* 36, no. 2 (June 2003) 173–195.

Faroqhi, Suraiya, *The Ottoman Empire and the World Around It* (London and New York, 2006).

Feng Menglong, *The Sorcerer's Revolt*, trans. Nathan Sturman (s.l., 2008).

Fleischer, Cornell H., *Bureaucrat and Intellectual in the Ottoman Empire: The Historian Mustafa Ali (1541–1600)* (Princeton, 1986).

Fleischer, Heinrich Leberecht, *Kleinere Schriften. Gesammelt, durchgesehen und vermehrt*, Neudruck der Ausgabe 1885–1888, vol. 3 (Osnabrück, 1968).

Foehr-Janssens, Yasmina, *Le Temps des fables: le 'Roman des Sept Sages'; ou, l'autre voie du roman* (Paris, 1994).

Forster, Regula, and Neguin Yavari, eds., *Global Medieval. Mirrors for Princes Reconsidered* (Boston etc., 2015).

Fouchécour, Charles-Henri de, *Le sage et le prince en Iran médiéval. Morale et politique dans les textes littéraires persans, IXe–XIIIe siècles* (Paris, 2009).

Franklin, Michael J., *Orientalist Jones: Sir William Jones, Poet, Lawyer, and Linguist, 1746–1794* (Oxford etc., 2011).

Garcin, Jean-Claude, ed., *Lectures du Roman de Baybars* (Marseille, 2003).

Garcin, Jean-Claude, ed., *Pour une lecture historique des 'Mille et une nuits': Essai sur l'édition de Būlāq, 1835* (Arles and Paris, 2013).

Gernet, Jacques, *A History of Chinese Civilization*, J.R. Foster, ed. (Cambridge, 1987).

Goldman, Shalom, *The Wiles of Women, the Wiles of Men: Joseph and Potiphar's Wife in Ancient Near Eastern, Jewish, and Islamic Folklore* (Albany, 1995).

Grotzfeld, Heinz, and Sophia Grotzfeld, *Die Erzählungen aus 'Tausendundeiner Nacht'* (Darmstadt, 1984).

Hagen, Gottfried, 'Translations and Translators in a Multilingual Society: A Case Study of Persian-Ottoman Translations, Late Fifteenth to Early Seventeenth Century', *Eurasian studies* 2, no. 1 (2003) 95–134.

Hamza, Amir, *De roman van Amir Hamza*, trans. P.S. van Ronkel (Leiden, 1895).

Han Fei Tzu, *Basic writings*, Burton Watson, trans. (New York, 1964).

Hanna, Nelly, *In Praise of Books: A Cultural History of Cairo's Middle Class, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Century* (Cairo, 2004).

Herzog, Thomas, *Geschichte und Imaginaire. Entstehung, Überlieferung und Bedeutung der Sirat Baibars in ihrem sozio-politischen Kontext*. Diskurse der Arabistik 8 (Wiesbaden, 2006).

Hirschler, Konrad, *The Written Word in the Medieval Arabic Lands: A Social and Cultural History of Reading Practices* (Edinburgh, 2015).

Hitzel, Frédéric, ed., *Istanbul et les langues orientales*. Varia Turcica 31 (Paris and Montreal, 1996).

Holt, P.M., Ann K.S. Lambton, and Bernard Lewis, eds., *The Cambridge History of Islam*, vol. 2A. *The Indian Sub-Continent, South-East Asia, Africa and the Muslim West* (Cambridge etc., 2003).

Hsia, Adrian, ed., *The Vision of China in the English Literature of the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Hong Kong, 1998).

Hung Sheng, *The Palace of Eternal Youth*, trans. Yang Hsien-yi and Gladys Yang (Beijing, 1955).

K'ung Shang-Jen, *The Peach Blossom Fan*, Chen Shih-hsiang, Harold Acton, and Cyril Birch, trans. (New York, 1976).

La docte Sympathie: Tawaddud al-Jâriya. Conte des 1001 Nuits—version de Tombouctou (Paris, 2015).

La Fayette, Madame de, *Zayde* (Paris: Gallimard Flammarion, 2006).

Lacarra, María Jesús, *Cuentistica medieval en España: los orígenes* (Zaragoza, 1979).

Lach, Donald F., *Asia in the Making of Europe*, vol. 2, *A Century of Wonder* (Chicago and London, 1977).

Lakhnavi, Ghalib, and Abdullah Bilgrami, *The Adventures of Amir Hamza*, trans. Musharraf Ali Farooqi (New York, 2007).

Lang, David Marshall, *The First Russian Radical: Alexander Radishchev, 1749–1802* (London, 1959).

Leeuwen, Richard van, 'De *Duizend en één nacht* en de *Odyssee*: een neoplatonistische omzwerving', Stichting Zenobia (Amsterdam, 2014).

Leeuwen, Richard van, 'Love or Lust: Sexual Relationships Between Humans and Jinns in the *Thousand and One Nights* and *The Djinn in the Nightingale's Eye*', in: Talib, Adam, Marlé Hammond, and Arie Schippers, eds., *The Rude, the Bad and the Bawdy: Essays in Honour of Professor Geert Jan van Gelder* (s.l.: Gibb Memorial Trust, 2014).

Leeuwen, Richard van, 'Religion and Oriental Tales in the 18th Century: The Emergence of the Fantastic Genre', in: Aboubakr Chraïbi and Ilaria Vitali, eds, *Variations françaises sur les Mille et une nuits: quelles versions pour quelles effets?* Francofonia; studi e ricerche sulle letterature di lingua francese 69 (Autumn, 2015) 35–56.

Leeuwen, Richard van, 'The *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* and the *Thousand and One Nights*', *Études de Lettres* 4, no. 292 (2012) 133–149.

Leeuwen, Richard van, 'The *Thousand and One Nights* and the Formation of Genres: The Case of Jacques Cazotte', in: Christian Szyska and Friederike Pannewick, eds., *Crossings and Passages in Genre and Culture* (Wiesbaden, 2003) 53–63.

Leeuwen, Richard van, *The Thousand and One Nights: Space, Travel and Transformation* (London and New York, 2007).

Les trente-deux marches du trône ou comment mériter le pouvoir, trans. Daniel Lescallier (Paris, 2014).

Les Trente-deux récits du trône (*Batris-sinhasan*) *ou les merveilleux exploits de Vikramaditya*, Léon Feer, trans. (Paris, 1883).

Madariaga, Isabel de, *Politics and Culture in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (London and New York, 1998).

Manjhan, *Madhumalati: An Indian Sufi Romance*, trans. Aditya Behl and Simon Weightman (Oxford, 2000).

Martino, Pierre, *L'Orient dans la littérature française au XVIIe et au XVIIIe siècle* (Paris, 1906).

Martorell, Joanot, and Martí Joan de Galba, *Tirant lo Blanc*, trans. David H. Rosenthal (London, 1984).

Marzolph, Ulrich, and Richard van Leeuwen, eds., *The Arabian Nights Encyclopedia*, 2 vols. (Santa Barbara, CA, 2004).

Mélanges de literature orientale, traduits de différens manuscrits turcs, arabes et persans de la Bibliothèque du Roi, par M. Cardonne, 2 vols. (Paris, 1772).

Moin, A. Azfar, *The Millennial Sovereign: Sacred Kingship and Sainthood in Islam* (New York, 2014).

Montesquieu, Charles de Secondat, baron de, *Lettres persanes*, Gonzague Truc, ed. (Paris, 1946).

Montgomery, James E., 'Al-Sindibad and Polyphemus: Reflections on the Genesis of an Archetype', in: Angelika Neuwirth, Birgit Embaló, Sebastian Günther, and Maher Jarrar, eds., *Myths, Historical Archetypes and Symbolic Figures in Arabic Literature: Towards a New Hermeneutic Approach* (Stuttgart and Beirut, 1999) 437–466.

Mote, F.W., *Imperial China 900–1800* (Cambridge, MA, 1999).

Osterhammel, Jürgen, *Die Entzauberung Asiens: Europa und die asiatischen Reiche im 18. Jahrhundert* (Munich, 2013).

Pascual Asensi, Jorge, 'Tras los "signos de la profecía": a propósito de las fuentes ideológicas y literarias del *Fecho de Buluqiya* y su pervivencia en la literatura piadosa de los moriscos', *Sharq al-Andalus* 18 (2003–2007) 173–201.

Pistor-Hatam, Anja, 'The Art of Translation. Rewriting Persian Texts from the Seljuks to the Ottomans', in: *Essays on Ottoman Civilization. Proceedings of the XIIth Congress of the Comité International D'etudes Pré-Ottomanes et Ottomanes, Praha 1996, Archív Orientální, Supplementa VIII (1998)* (Prague, 1998) 305–316.

Porphyry, *Select Works of Porphyry*, Thomas Taylor, ed. (London, 1823).

Potocki, Jean, *Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse* (*version de 1810*), François Rosset and Dominique Triaire, eds. (Paris, 2008).

Potocki, Jean, *Voyage dans l'empire du Maroc fait en l'année 1791* (Paris, 1997).

Potocki, Jean, *Voyage en Turquie et en Égypte*, Serge Plantureux, ed. (Paris, 1999).

Pritchett, Frances W., *The Romance Tradition in Urdu: Adventures from the Dastan of Amir Hamzah* (New York, 1991).

Proclaiming Harmony, trans. William O. Hennessey (Ann Arbor, 1981).

Qian Cai, *General Yue Fei*, trans. T.L. Yang (Hong Kong, 1995).

Radishchev, Alexander N., *A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow*, trans. Leo Wiener (Cambridge, 1958).

Reardon, B.P., ed., *Collected Ancient Greek Novels* (Berkeley, 1989).

Reinhard, Wolfgang, ed., *Empires and Encounters 1350–1750* (Cambridge and London, 2015).

Ricci, Ronit, *Islam Translated: Literature, Conversion and the Arabic Cosmopolis of South and Southeast Asia* (Chicago and London, 2011).

Riche, Barnabe, *The Adventures of Brusanus, Prince of Hungaria* (*1592*), Joseph Khoury, ed. (Toronto, 2014).

Roman de Baïbars, trans. Georges Bohas and Jean-Patrick Guillaume, 10 vols. (Paris, 1985).

Schaefer, Klaus, *Christoph Martin Wieland* (Stuttgart and Weimar, 1996).

Schimmel, Annemarie, *Classical Urdu Literature from the Beginning to Iqbal* (Wiesbaden, 1975).

Schmidt, Jan, *Mustafâ ʿÂlî's Künhü 'l-Ahbâr and its Preface According to The Leiden Manuscript*, Nederlands Historisch-Archeologisch Instituut te Istanbul (Istanbul, 1987).

Sela, Ron, *The Legendary Biographies of Tamerlane. Islam and Heroic Apocrypha in Central Asia* (Cambridge etc., 2011).

Seyyidî Alî Re'îs, *Le Miroir des pays. Una anabase ottomane à travers l'Inde et l'Asie centrale*, trans. Jean-Louis Bacqué-Grammont (Arles, 1999).

Shackle, Christopher, 'The Story of Sayf al-Muluk in South Asia', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society*, Third series, 17, no. 2 (April 2007) 115–129.

Shaw, Gregory, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus* (University Park, PA, 1995).

Shcherbatov, M.M., *On the Corruption of Morals in Russia*, trans. A. Lentin (Cambridge etc., 1969).

Sieber, Patricia, 'The Imprint of the Imprints: Sojourners, *Xiaoshuo* Translations, and the Transcultural Canon of Early Chinese Fiction in Europe, 1697–1826', *East Asian Publishing and Society* 3 (2013) 31–70.

Singh, Guru Gobind, *Zafarnama*, trans. Navtej Sarna (Haryana etc., 2011).

Sivadasa, *The Five-and-Twenty Tales of the Genie*, trans. Chandra Rajan (London, 2006).

Subrahmanyam, Sanjay, *Courtly Encounters: Translating Courtliness and Violence in Early Modern Eurasia* (Cambridge and London, 2012).

Suhravardi, Qutban, *The Magic Doe. Qutban Suhravardi's Mirigavati*, trans. Aitya Behl (Oxford, 2012).

Supplemental Nights to the Book of the Thousand Nights and a Night, 7 vols., trans. Richard Burton, (s.l., s.d. [1905?]).

Tahcin-Uddin, *Les aventures de Kamrup*, trans. M. Garcin de Tassy (Paris, 1834).

Tahsin-al-Din, *The Loves of Camarupa and Calamata: An Ancient Indian Tale*, trans. William Franklin (London: Kessinger Legacy Reprints, 1793).

Tardieu, Michel, 'Sabiens coraniques et "Sabiens" de Harran', *Journal Asiatique* 274 (1986) 1–44.

The Arabian Nights: Tales of 1001 Nights, trans. Malcolm C. Lyons and Ursula Lyons, 3 vols. (London, 2008)

The Catalan Expedition to the East: from the Chronicle *of Ramon Muntaner*, trans. Robert D. Hughes (Barcelona, 2006).

The Epic of Gilgamesh, trans. N.K. Sandars (Harmondsworth, 1974).

The Story of Muhammad Hanafiyya: A Medieval Muslim Romance, trans. L.F. Brakel (The Hague, 1977).

Thomas, Henry, *Spanish and Portuguese Romances of Chivalry* (Cambridge etc., 1920).

Thorau, Peter, *The Lion of Egypt: Sultan Baybars I and the Near East in the Thirteenth Century* (Harlow, 1987).

Tietze, Andreas, 'Aziz efendis Muhayyelat', *Oriens* 1, no. 2 (December 1948) 248–329.

Tietze, Andreas, 'The Poet as Critique of Society: A 16th century Ottoman poem', *Turcica. Revue d'études turques* 9, no. 1 (1977) 120–160.

Tyler, Margaret, *Mirror of Princely Deeds and Knighthood*, Joyce Boro, ed., MHRA Tudor and Stuart Translations, vol. 11 (London, 2014).

Vaeth, Joseph Anthony, *Tirant lo Blanch: A Study of its Authorship, Principal Sources and Historical Setting* (Memphis, 2010).

Vassalo e Silva, Nuno, and Jorge Flores, eds, *Goa and the Great Mughal* (London, 2004).

Wieland, Christoph Martin, *Der goldene Spiegel oder Die Könige von Scheschian* (Berlin: Sammlung Zenodot, 2008).

Wu wang fa chou p'ing-hua, in: Liu Ts'un-yan, *Buddhist and Taoist Influences on Chinese novels*, vol. 1, *The Authorship of the Feng Shen Yen I* (Wiesbaden, 1962) 6–75.

Zahiri de Samarkand, *Le livre des sept vizirs*, trans. Dejan Bogdanović (Paris, 1975).

Zhong Kui, *Bezwinger der Teufel. Altchinesisches Volksbuch*, trans. Clemens du Bois-Reymond (Leipzig and Weimar, 1987).

Index

A Babylonian Story 85
Abd al-Muttalib 122
abdication 47, 123, 128, 135
absolute power, absolutism 49, 63–64, 68–69, 199–200, 218, 222, 224–225, 228–229, 246, 251
Abu Nuwas 63
Abu Yusuf 63
Aceh 144
adab 7, 21, 62–63
Ad, tribe of 110
adventure trope 111, 117, 131, 151, 155, 180
advise, advisors *See* concubines; eunuchs; ministers; viziers
'Ajib and Gharib', the story of 109–110, 122, 152
A journey from St Petersburg to Moscow 243–250
  See also Radishchev, Alexander
Akbar (Mughal emperor) 52, 121
'Aladdin', the story of 7, 100
Alauddin (Delhi sultan) 142
al-Azhar Mosque 151
al-Azmeh, Aziz 61
al-Badawi, Sayyid Ahmad 150, 153–154
alchemy 84, 86
Aleppo 149
Alexander the Great 53, 125–126, 129, 158, 205
Alexander romance 121, 156
Alf Layla wa-layla *See Thousand and one nights*
'Ali Baba', story of 8
Ali ibn Abi Talib (caliph) 124
al-Itlidi 62
  I'lam al-nas 62
al-Khadir, Khidlir 81, 144, 146, 150, 153, 158
al-Lat 128, 158
al-Manat 128, 158
al-Ma'mun (Abbasid caliph) 155
al-Mahdi (Abbasid caliph) 155
al-Mu'tasim (Abbasid caliph) 155
al-Razi 84
al-Salih Ayyub (Ayyubid ruler of Egypt) 148–151, 154
  wife of 164
al-Tha'alabi 79
Amadis de Gaule 120, 182
Anatolia 81, 155, 201, 222
angels 80, 82, 98, 124, 128–129, 156
Anusherwan I (Sassanid emperor) 92, 122–133
appointing officials 40, 74, 137, 204–206, 208–210, 212–214, 235
Aqsa Mosque 148
Aragon 119
Aristotle 119, 122, 158, 187
Armenia 118
astrology 18, 25–26, 52, 58, 84, 86, 122–123, 130, 156, 169
  See also prediction, prophecy
Aurangzeb (Mughal emperor) 200
Austria 119, 200
Ayn Jalut, battle of 151
Ayyubid dynasty 147–151, 154
  See also al-Salih Ayyub
'Azadbakht', the story of ('The ten viziers') 38

Baghdad 62–63, 67, 71, 155–156
Balkh 149
Bavaria 119
Baybars *See Sirat Baybars*
Becarra 242
Beckford, William Thomas 99, 106
  Épisodes 99
  Vathek 106
Bedford 119
Behl, Aditya 174–178
Bejaïa 118
Bible, biblical 81, 116, 119, 158
  See also Corinthians; John; Paul; Preacher
Bildungsroman 233
Bilgrami, Abdullah 122
Book of Amir Hamza 109, 121–133, 138, 140, 152, 155–156, 165–166, 198
Brahmin 58–59, 227
Buddhism 38–39, 71, 88, 108, 135, 138, 258
Bulaq 149
Bulaq edition *See Thousand and one nights*
'Buluqiya', the story of 79–84, 86, 158–159

Burgundy 119
Burton, Richard 38
Byzantine, Byzantium 86, 114, 116–120, 132, 141, 144–145, 150–151, 155

Caesarea 155
Cappadocia 118
Cardonne, Denis Dominique 217
Mélanges de littérature orientale 217
Castilian, Castile 114, 119, 190
Castle of Otranto, The 99
Catalan 114, 191
Catherine II (Empress of Russia) 239–243, 249–250
Catholic, Catholicism 98, 105, 184, 190, 225
Caucasus 100, 147
Caylus, Anne Claude Comte de 38, 179, 217
Nouveaux contes orientaux 38, 217
Cazotte, Jacques 38, 80, 99, 106, 217
Suite des milles et une nuits 99, 217
Celtic 17, 182
Cervantes, Miguel de 113–115, 120, 182, 189
Don Quijote de la Mancha 113–115, 182
Ceylon 126, 144
Chagatay 178–179
Chengiz Khan 202
Chilon 187
Chishti order 168
chivalric romances 4, 9, 19–21, 82, 109–115, 117, 119–121, 138, 146, 152, 164, 167, 180, 182–184, 190, 254
See also 'Ajib and Gharib'; *Book of Amir Hamza*; love; love romances; neo-chivalric romances; Sayyid Battal; *Sirat Baybars*; *The History of Hang Tuah*; *Tirant lo Blanc*; 'Umar al-Nu'man and his sons'; *Yue Fei*
Chrétien de Troyes 21
Christianity 22, 106–107, 114–120, 150–158, 184, 190–195, 201, 216–217, 222–224, 249
Cifar 182
Circassians 151, 235
'City of Brass', the story of 130
Classical Antiquity 21, 116, 120, 233, 251
communal identity 113, 119, 128–129, 140–141, 145–147, 153–154, 161–162, 181, 196–197, 237–238, 250, 254–257
concubines 26, 29–31, 34–36, 41–42, 47, 72, 90–91, 94, 137, 163–164, 212–215, 219–220, 226–228
See also Proclaiming harmony; *King Wu's expedition against the Zhou*; *The seven viziers*
Confucius, Confucianism 38–39, 199, 210–211
Constantinople 100, 114–121, 150–151, 155–156, 158–159, 161, 182–184, 191, 196, 201–202, 228
continuity/discontinuity 22, 24, 28, 30–32, 49–51, 61, 71, 103–105, 112, 117, 127, 140–141, 151, 160–161, 164–166, 181, 188, 196, 237–238, 255, 257
dynastic 30–32, 49–51, 103–104, 140, 166, 171
See also liminality; silence
conversion 82, 103, 110–112, 116, 118–119, 122, 124, 126–133, 156, 192
Corinthians (Bible) 119
Corneille, Pierre 242
cosmic order, harmony. *See* ideals of rulership; supernatural elements
Counsel for the sultans 201–204, 206
Creation of the gods 71–76, 88, 94, 97, 211
Crébillon, Claude Prosper Jolyot de 225–226, 237
Le sopha 225
criticisms of rulers, governments 20, 131–132, 199–200, 204–215, 253
crusades, crusaders 22, 119, 147–148, 201, 217
Ctesiphon 122, 125, 127, 129
Curial e Güelfa 114
curiosity 58, 64, 68–69, 71, 169
cyclops 172, 178–179
Cyprus 182

Damascus 118, 148–151, 164, 205
Danyal, Daniel 83, 122, 125, 130
Daud, David 124, 156
Daylamites 110, 151
Dede Korkut 172, 179
Delhi 168
demons 57, 60–61, 70–72, 77, 99, 112, 124, 169–170, 172, 177, 256–257
dervish 63–64, 149, 151, 153, 209
despotism 20, 22, 34–35, 73–74, 94, 200, 204, 210, 215–223, 229, 235–238, 251, 257
See also Oriental despotism

destiny. *See* fate
Dhat al-Himma 155
See also Sayyid Battal
dialogue, dialogism 28, 31–32, 49, 56, 61, 87, 102, 189, 194–201, 232, 237, 252–253
Diderot, Denis 20, 215–217, 225–232, 237, 242–243
Les bijoux indiscrets 217, 225–229, 231, 238
Die Abderiten 233
Diogenes 187
disguises 59, 64–65, 67, 69–70, 77, 158, 174, 186, 248, 257
dissidence 198–200, 204–210
See also criticisms of rulers, governments; revolts
divine kingship *See* kingship
Dom Chavis 38, 80, 217
Don Quijote de la Mancha 113–115, 182
Don Sylvio de Ronsalva 233
Dream of the red chamber 94, 134
dreams 34, 41, 47, 91, 109, 123, 126, 134, 142, 156, 227, 245–248
Dschinnistan 233
Dutch 123, 142, 145, 239
dynastic continuity *See* continuity/discontinuity

East India Company 142
Edict of Nantes 229
education of rulers, princes 25, 30, 36, 55, 105–106, 117
See also ideals of rulership; kingship
Egypt 8–10, 14, 22, 63, 80, 100, 118, 126, 144, 147–153, 160, 182, 201, 234
El libro de Sendebar 25
Elias (prophet) 158
England 115–119, 182–184, 200, 216, 222, 228, 239
Enlightenment 98, 100, 134, 203, 215–216, 222, 225, 233, 242–245
Epic of Gilgamesh 81
Épisodes 99
eroticism 103, 105, 120, 163–165, 226
esoteric knowledge *See* knowledge, esoteric, forbidden
ethnicity *See* communal identity
Euclid 122
eunuchs 211–212, 219–222
Eve 144
Exeter 119
exoticism 99, 167, 183–184, 190–191, 200, 216–218
See also Orientalism

fables 24
fairies 41, 91, 214
fairytale 102, 233–234
fate 20–21, 71–76, 90, 93, 95–98, 135, 171–173, 176–177, 180–181, 187–188, 193, 195, 197
Farooqi, Musharraf Ali 122
femininity 69, 103–104, 181, 260
See also gender; women
Feng Menglong 88, 94, 98
The sorcerer's revolt 88–98, 134
Fereç ba'd eş-Šidde 179
Fez 101, 118
fictionality 14–16, 29–30, 32–33, 43–45, 50, 61–62, 69, 94–95, 99, 114–115, 117–118, 122, 138, 141, 152, 160, 229–231, 248, 253–254
Firdawsi 21, 121, 204, 206
Shahnama 21, 121
fire-worshippers 110, 122, 128, 132, 148, 151, 153–154, 256
Fleischer, Heinrich Leberecht 86
Forbidden City 47
Fortunatus 183
foundation myths 141–146
France 8, 119, 164, 200, 216, 222, 224, 228–230, 239, 243, 249
Franks 144–154
framing story 7, 24, 27–30, 54–57, 62–65, 67–70, 79–80, 83–84, 102–105, 177, 192, 234–235, 243
Friesland 119

Gabriel *See* Jibril
Galba, Marti Joan de 114
Tirant lo Blanc 114–122, 132–133, 138, 140, 164–166, 182, 184
Galen 122, 204
Galland, Antoine 7–8, 99–101, 216, 226
Mille et une nuits 8, 99–101
Garcin, Jean-Claude 9, 86
Gautier, Théophile 38

gender 196–197
See also femininity; masculinity; women
General Yue Fei *See Yue Fei*
genies/jinns 55–60, 64, 80–82, 88, 110–111, 116, 124, 126–127, 150, 168, 171–173, 176–179, 227
genre 27–30
See also literature; romances
Germany, German 4, 143, 159, 216, 233, 235
Ghawwās 179
ghuls 110, 124
Giafar et Barmaki 101
Gobindh Singh 200
gods, goddesses 41, 71–76, 88–97, 128–129, 142, 174
Goethe, Johann Wolfgang von 233
Wilhelm Meister novels 233
Golconda 179
Goldene Spiegel, Der 232–239
Gothic literature 90
Granada 118, 182, 190
Greece, Greek 22, 27, 79, 108, 126, 155, 161, 187, 191–194, 234

Hafiz 204
Hajj 144, 146, 156
Hamzanama *See Book of Amir Hamza*
Han Feizi 39–40, 50, 52, 210–211
Hang Tuah *See The History of Hang Tuah*
Hanna Diyab 7
harem 26, 34, 109, 218–222, 232, 258
harmony *See* ideals of rulership; supernatural elements
Harran 84–85
Harun al-Rashid (Abbasid caliph) 19, 62–65, 67–71, 76, 235
Hasib Karim al-Din 79, 83–86, 158
See also Jamasp
Hazar afsana (*Thousand nights*) 7
Hebrew 27
Hieroglyphs 99
Hindi, Hindavi 4, 17, 20, 86, 108, 126, 167–168, 174
Hindu 60, 146, 174
histoire galante 102, 190, 231
Holy Land 117, 119
Homer 85
Odyssey 85, 172
houris 60
Huang Zongxi 210–215
Waiting for the dawn 211
Hud (Prophet) 110, 124
Huizong (Song emperor) 46, 51, 134, 175
humanism 21, 115
Hungary, Hungaria 183–184
Hung Sheng 20, 210–215
The palace of eternal youth 210–215

I'lam al-nas 62
Iamblichus 84–85
Iberian Peninsula 22, 120
Ibn al-Nadim 7
Ibrahim, Abraham 82, 110, 132
ideals of rulership 55–58, 60, 75–76, 115
appointing officials 40, 74, 137, 204–206, 208–210, 212–214, 235
avoiding indulgence 26, 36, 40–43, 47–48, 106, 185, 189, 212–215, 235, 242
chivalry 120–121
filial piety 42
harmony, order 43–44, 46, 51, 61, 69, 78, 96–98, 133
honesty 74, 225
humility 59
loyalty 137–138, 140–141, 145
martial 202–203
objectification 40, 50
personal heroic 130–133, 137–141, 145–148, 154–155, 181, 196
protecting, serving subjects 37, 76–77, 153, 185, 188–189, 204, 211
religion 35–37, 52–53, 60, 62, 118–119, 153, 224, 238
reason, rationality 32–33, 35–36, 39–40, 49–50, 61, 68, 78, 107, 223–225, 237–238, 256
self-sacrifice 43–44, 56, 58–59, 70, 137, 140, 211
tradition 30–31, 37, 50–51, 70, 131–133
See also kingship; legitimation of rulership
Il principe 39
India, Indian 10, 12, 17, 21–22, 24, 52–54, 62, 81, 86, 110–111, 118, 121, 123, 126, 129, 146, 167–174, 178–180, 200–201, 215–217, 228
Indo-Persian 60
Indra 55, 57, 174
Indrapura 143, 145

Initiation 24, 33, 38, 55, 78–79, 82, 87–88, 105–108, 111, 146, 171, 177, 188–189, 195, 197, 232, 257–258
interruption *See* continuity/discontinuity
Iraq 109, 201
Ishaq, Isaäc 124, 156
Islam, Muslim 22, 27, 52–53, 60–62, 81–82, 85, 95, 102–103, 106–108, 114–115, 118, 121–122, 127–128, 131, 133, 142, 146, 149–156, 165–168, 174, 178, 190, 195, 199–203, 224, 255, 258
Isma'il, Ismael (Safavid shah) 52
Ismaili, Isma'ili 148, 155
Isra'iliyyat 80
Israelites 81
Istanbul 80, 100, 144–146, 216
Italy, Italian 114, 119, 190, 217

Ja'far al-Barmaki 63–65, 69
Jade Emperor 89–97
Jafeth, Yafith 111
'Jali'ad of Hind and his vizier Shimas', the story of 34–38, 43, 88
Jamasp 86, 130, 156, 159
See also Hasib Karim al-Din
Jami 204
Janissaries 209
'Janshah', the story of 79–81, 83, 86, 169–173, 176–180
Java, Javanese 121, 143, 145
Jedda 144
Jerusalem 80, 115–116, 150
Jesus 25, 82, 118
jeunes de langues 80, 216
Jewish 80–81, 108, 156, 158–159, 169, 222
Jibril (Gabriel) 80, 124, 128–129–156
jinn *See* genies/jinns; supernatural elements
John (Bible) 119
Joseph/Yusuf 25, 27, 124
Jürchen tribes 45–47, 135

Kaaba 158
Kalila wa-Dimna 24
Kathasaritsagara 21, 54
Kaykavus 25
Qabusnama 25
Khulasatu-l-ahval 206
Khwarazm 153
King Arthur 53, 119–120
kingship
aesthetic element 3, 173, 181, 256
divine 55–57, 59–60, 76–79, 87–88, 141–146
physical presence 67, 218, 221–222
popular perception of 13–16, 53, 129–130, 148, 154, 159–161, 180, 182–183, 199
See also absolute power, absolutism; astrology; chivalry; criticisms of rulers, governments; education of rulers, princes; ideals of rulership; legitimation of rulership; knowledge, esoteric, forbidden; succession; supernatural elements
King Wu's expedition against the Zhou 41–45, 72
See also Creation of the gods
Kling 143–144
knowledge, esoteric, forbidden 79–100, 107–108, 127, 130, 176–177, 255
Kufa 109–110

Les bijoux indiscrets 217, 225–229, 231, 238
L'Esprit des lois 238
La Fayette, Madame de 20, 190
Zaïde 190–196, 201
Lakhnavi, Ghalib 122
Lala Mustafa 206
Le sopha 225
Legalist School, legalism 22, 39–40, 210–211
legitimation of rulership
by bringing harmony, stability 71, 96–98, 133, 140–141, 153
in the Ottoman Empire 202–203
through foundation myths 141–146
through history 255–256
through literature 11–16
through religion 35–36, 52–53, 62, 132, 153, 202, 222, 238, 255–256
Lettres persanes 217–231, 238
Levant 9, 114
liminality 56, 64–65, 69, 103–105, 171, 174, 181, 193, 258
See also continuity/discontinuity; silence
literature
dramatization 16, 29, 50, 87
form 27–29, 32, 102–103
generalization 30–31

popular, elite 13–17, 62, 81, 161, 174, 180, 199
transmission of 4, 10–18, 54, 79–81, 85–87, 101–103, 106–107, 114, 121–122, 178–180, 253
See also adventure trope; continuity/discontinuity; dialogue, dialogism; fictionality; framing story; genre; Gothic literature; initiation; liminality; printing press; Romanticism; silence; *Thousand and one nights*
Llibre de l'Ordre de Cavalleria 114
Llull, Ramon 114
Llibre de l'Ordre de Cavalleria 114
Lombardy, Lombards 119
Louis XIV 228–229
love
abstaining from 185–188
as narrative postponement 165
between a man and a *jinniya* 64, 83, 165, 168, 170–173, 176
discussing, contemplating 120, 165–166
initiation 165, 171, 174, 180, 257–258
rejected 67–69, 187, 221–222
true 188, 192–195, 214, 228, 238
See also chivalric romances; eroticism; love romances; *rasa*
love romances 4, 15, 20, 83, 105, 109, 163–198, 215, 254
Arabic and Indian 167–181
European 182–197
See also 'Janshah'; *Madhumalati*; *Mirigavati*; 'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur'; 'Sayf al-Muluk and Badi al-Jamal'; *The adventures of Brusanus*; *The mirror of princely deeds and knighthood*
Luṭfī 179

Macedonia 114
Machiavelli 39
Il principe 39
Madhumalati 86, 168, 174, 177–180
magic *See* supernatural elements
Mahabharata 21, 54, 174
Mahmud (Sultan of Ghazna) 121
Majlisi 179
Makhtuta Taymuriyya 86
Malacca 142–146
Malatya 155–156, 159
Mamluk 7, 9, 147–150, 155, 178, 202
Manchu, Manchuria 45, 133–134, 147, 210, 212
mandate of heaven 73–74
Manila 145
Mansur Shah (Sultan of Malacca) 142
Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse 101–107, 111, 167, 201
Marcus Aurelius 187
Marmontel 242
Martorell, Juanot 114
Tirant lo Blanc 114–122, 132–133, 138, 140, 164–166, 182, 184
masculinity 67, 103–104, 181, 197, 219, 238, 260
masnavi, *mathnawi* 178–179
Mecca 60, 123, 125, 127–128, 144–146, 201
Medina 201
Mediterranean 114, 121, 182–183, 189–190, 258
Mélanges de littérature orientale 217
Menjabalut 145
Mesopotamia 79, 81, 84, 259
methodology 1–5, 10–23
Middle East 5, 9–10, 17, 22, 79, 259
Mille et un jours 217
Mille et une nuits 8, 99–101
Ming China 14, 22, 88, 94, 134, 200, 210–212
ministers 42–49, 56–57, 71–78, 81, 96–97, 133, 136–138, 142–146, 198–200, 210–214, 224, 234–235, 248, 252, 257
advising rulers 42–45, 47–49, 76, 198–200
corruption 42–43, 46–48, 96–97, 136, 145–146, 210–213
counterbalance to rulers 198–200, 210–212, 257
loyalty 73–75, 133, 198
See also Huang Zongxi; Hung Sheng; nepotism; viziers
Mirigavati 168–178, 180
mirror-for-princes 5, 11, 19, 25, 32, 61, 67–68, 70, 106, 183–184, 188, 203, 232–234, 253
See also nasihatnama; *The seven viziers*; *The mirror of princely deeds and knighthood*
misogyny 188, 197, 238, 257
'Mock caliph', the story of the 65–69

Moin, Azfar 52, 129–131
Mongolia, Mongols 22, 45, 100, 133, 147–148, 150–151, 153, 164
Montesquieu 20, 215, 217, 225, 229–232, 237–238, 240, 242
L'Esprit des lois 238
Lettres persanes 217–231, 238
Morgana 119
Morocco 100–101
Mount Qaf 80, 82, 111, 123–124, 127, 130, 158, 170
Mughal Empire 21, 52, 121, 129, 168, 174, 200, 203, 216
Muhammad, the Prophet 80–83, 87, 118, 122, 126–128, 148, 156, 158–159, 174
Muntaner, Ramon 114
Mustafa Ali 201–210
Counsel for the sultans 201–204, 206
Khulasatu-l-ahval 206

Nadir Shah Afshar (Shah of Iran) 121
Nanjing 136–137
nasihatnama 200, 203
Navarra 119
neo-chivalric romances 182–184
Neoplatonism 84–87
nepotism 46, 203, 209–210, 242, 203, 209–210, 242
Nether-India 118
Nizam al-Mulk 25
Siyasatnama 25
Nouveaux contes orientaux 38, 217
novels 15, 113, 115, 121
biographical 152
experimental 229–232
fantastic 106
historical 138
love 167, 190
Nuh, Noah 111, 124
Nur al-Din Hospital 149
nymphs 85, 169, 177

Ocean of streams of stories 54
Odyssey 85, 172
On the cave of the nymphs 85
On the corruption of morals in Russia 240–242
oral storytelling 13–14, 54, 81, 83, 88, 108, 121
Orientalism 17, 20, 99–100, 121, 183, 189–190, 200–201, 215–225, 228–229, 233, 251
See also exoticism
Oriental despotism 217–223, 236–238
See also despotism
Orlov, Grigory 242
Orthodox Church 239
Ottoman (Empire) 8–10, 79–83, 86–87, 146–147, 155, 159, 179, 200–203, 205, 216–218, 222, 229–230
Ouseley, William 38
Outlaws of the marches 94

Padmavati 174
Palace of eternal youth 211–215
Palembang 142
Palmerin d'Oliva 120, 182
Pandits 58
Paris 8
Paul (Bible) 119
Perceval, Caussin de 38
Peter I, Peter the Great (Emperor of Russia) 239
Pétis de la Croix, François 8, 179, 217
Mille et une jours 217
Pierre de Provence 183
Piri Reis 81
pilgrimage, pilgrim 60, 115–116, 118, 144, 149, 164, 246, 248
See also Hajj
Plato 122, 187
Plutarchus 187
poison 26, 151, 183, 207, 220
Poland 119
Porphyry 84–85
On the cave of the nymphs 85
'Porter and the three ladies of Baghdad', the story of 62–65, 69, 71
Portugal 119
Potocki, Jan 98–107, 167
Manuscrit trouvé à Saragosse 101–107, 111, 167, 201
Voyage en Turquie et l'Égypte 100
Preacher (Bible) 119
prediction, prophecy 26–27, 52, 55, 72–73, 122–123, 134, 149–153, 156, 160–161, 170–171, 142–143, 147–151, 156, 168–171, 177, 192
See also astrology

printing press 14, 17, 250
Proclaiming harmony 45–48, 50–51, 134, 136
prostitution 47, 55
See also concubines
Protestants 183–184, 229
Protogenes 187
Proverbio, Delio 179
Pythagoras 84–85, 122, 187

Qabusnama 25
Qalawun 148, 151
'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur', the story of 20, 168, 177–178
Qian Cai 134
Yue Fei 114, 133–141, 164
Qing China 134–135, 200, 210–211, 215
qisas al-anbiya (stories of the prophets) 79, 81, 83, 177
Qur'an 27, 35, 81–83, 110, 122, 124, 128, 146, 149, 156, 158, 216
Qutban Suhravardi 168
Mirigavati 168–178, 180

Rabelaisian 124
Racine, Jean 242
Radishchev, Alexander 243–244, 248
A journey from St Petersburg to Moscow 243–250
Rajgiri, Manjhan 168, 177
Madhumalati 86, 168, 174, 177–180
Ramayana 21, 54, 174
rasa 173–174, 176, 179–181
rationality, reason 32–33, 35–36, 39–40, 49–50, 61, 68, 78, 107, 223–225, 237–238, 256
religion *See* Bible, biblical; conversion; ideals of rulership; Islam, Muslim; legitimation; Muhammad, the Prophet; Orthodox Church; Qur'an; Sufi; Sunni
revolts 34–35, 42–43, 73–74, 92–94, 199, 212, 236
justification for 73–74
Rhodes 116, 118
Riche, Barnaby 20, 184–189
The adventures of Brusanus 20, 184–189
Rig Veda 174
Roger de Flor 114
romances *See* Alexander romance; chivalric romances; love romances
Romanov dynasty 239–240
Romanticism 99
Rome 117, 151
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques 242, 249
Rukh 127
rulership *See* kingship
Russia 12, 22, 100, 222, 239–244, 248, 258
Russian Academy of Oriental Languages 100
Rustam 122, 124–126, 129

Safavids 14, 52, 201
Saleh, Prophet 124
Samarkand 149
Samarqandi, Zahiri al- 25–27, 33
The seven viziers 19, 25–33, 35, 38, 50, 61, 64, 68, 70, 79, 105, 232, 238, 257–258
See also The Book of Sindbad; *The seven sages of Rome*; 'The wiles of women'
Sanskrit literature 6–7, 10, 21, 54, 61, 70, 168, 174, 178
Saracens 115, 184, 191, 217
Sassanids 21, 122, 126, 128, 165
'Sayf al-Muluk and Badi al-Jamal', the story of 20, 168–173, 176–180
Sayyid Battal 86, 155–162, 164, 202
Sayyida Zaynab 149
Schwärmerei 233–234, 237, 239
Scott, Walter 121
Sejara Melaya 142
Sela, Ron 159–161
Selim 205–206, 228, 231
Seneca 187
Shackle, Christopher 178
Shah Isma'il (Safavid shah) 52
Shahnama 21, 121
Shahrazad 5, 7, 62, 68, 103–104, 106, 225, 233–234, 259–260
Shahriyar 5, 67, 69, 102–104, 260
Shajarat al-Durr 164
Shang China 41, 74, 94, 211
Shattari order 177
Shcherbatov, Mikhail 240–242
On the corruption of morals in Russia 240–242
Shiites 107
Siam 144
Sikhs 200
silence 55–56, 70–71, 77, 87, 164, 194
Simurgh 127

'Sindbad', the story of 7, 25–26, 126, 130, 172, 178
sira 141, 148, 154–155
Sirat Baybars 147–155, 160, 164
Siva 56
Sivadasa 54
The five-and-twenty tales of the genie 54–56, 61, 88
Siyasatnama 25
Socrates 187
Somadeva 21, 54
Ocean of streams of stories 54
Song China 22, 45, 94, 134, 136, 138, 140
sorcery *See* supernatural elements
Spain 100–102, 106–107, 182, 191, 193, 196, 200, 222, 228
St Petersburg 239, 242–243
succession 25, 30–32, 70, 82, 103–104, 109–110, 155, 171
Sufi 52, 168, 174, 177–179
Suhrawardi 84
Suite des milles et une nuits 99, 217
Sukrasaptati 58
Sulayman, Solomon 79–80, 82–83, 124, 127, 130, 156, 158, 168, 170, 173–174, 176–177, 205
Suleyman the Magnificent 202–203, 206
Sunni 131, 147
supernatural elements
angels 80, 82, 98, 124, 128–129, 156
cosmic order, harmony 19, 44, 52, 78, 96–98, 108, 129, 133, 256, 258
cyclops 172, 178–179
deification 75–76
demons 57, 60–61, 70–72, 77, 99, 112, 124, 169–170, 172, 177, 256–257
divine kingship 55–57, 59–60, 76–79, 87–88, 141–146
enchanted objects 43, 57–60, 71, 73, 83, 89–91, 110–112, 119, 124–125, 129–130, 134–135, 146, 150, 156, 158, 227, 246
enchantments 55, 60, 63–64, 183
fox-spirits 41–45, 74–76, 89–95
genies/jinns 55–60, 64, 80–82, 88, 110–111, 116, 124, 126–127, 150, 168, 171–173, 176–179, 227
ghuls 110, 124
giants 110, 124, 150, 169–170, 172, 182–184, 227, 246
gods, goddesses 41, 71–76, 88–97, 128–129, 142, 174
immortals 71–75, 95, 138
in European literature 98–99, 106–107, 116, 119
jinniya 64, 83, 165, 168, 170–173, 176
magic, sorcery 73, 78–79, 84, 89–99, 106–107, 129–130, 183–184
metamorphosis 57–58, 130, 169–171, 174, 227, 248
nymphs 85, 169, 177
See also astrology; dreams; fairies; ideals of rulership, religious; Jade Emperor; knowledge, esoteric, forbidden; legitimation of rulership, through religion; mandate of heaven; prediction, prophecy; *The five-and-twenty tales of the genie*; *The sorcerer's revolt*; *Thirty-two steps to the throne*; Yellow Emperor
Syria 8, 126, 144, 147–149, 151, 153, 184, 201
syncretism 21, 52–54, 131, 142, 168, 174

Tales of the parrot 58
Tamim al-Dari 81
Tana 118
Tang dynasty, emperors 44, 90, 94, 134, 212
Taoism 38–39, 46–47, 71, 88–91, 134
Tarsus 155
Tartars 126, 134, 213
'Tawaddud', the story of 37
Tertullian 187
The adventures of Brusanus 20, 184–189
The book of Sindbad 7, 25–26, 126, 130, 172, 178
The five-and-twenty tales of the genie 54–56, 61, 88
See also Vetalapancavinsati
The History of Hang Tuah 141–146, 164, 174
The mirror of princely deeds and knighthood 20, 183–184
The palace of eternal youth 210–215
'The queen of the serpents', the story of 79–88, 127, 158, 177, 179
The seven sages of Rome 19, 25, 62, 215
The seven viziers 19, 25–33, 35, 38, 50, 61, 64, 68, 70, 79, 105, 232, 238, 257–258
See also The Book of Sindbad; *The seven sages of Rome*; 'The wiles of women'

The sorcerer's revolt 88–98, 134
'The wiles of women', the story of 25
Thirty-two steps to the throne 19, 53–54, 56–61
Thousand and one nights 62–64, 67, 69, 79–86, 99–107, 167–168, 172, 177–178, 259. *See Mille et une nuits*
  Arabic revival of 8–9
  Bulaq edition 8–9
  Hazar afsane 7
  in Europe 216–218, 233, 235, 237, 251–252
  transmission of 6–11, 17–18, 83, 87, 99–103, 106–107, 167–168, 253
  translations of 7–10, 38, 83, 87, 99–101, 216
Thousand and one nights, stories *See* 'Ajib and Gharib'; 'Aladdin'; 'Ali Baba'; 'Jali'ad of Hind and his vizier Shimas'; 'Janshah'; 'Porter and the three ladies of Baghdad'; 'Qamar al-Zaman and Budur'; 'Sayf al-Muluk and Badi al-Jamal'; 'Tawaddud'; 'The queen of the serpents'; 'The wiles of women'; 'Umar al-Nu'man and his sons';
Timur Lang, Tamerlane 159, 178, 202, 205
Timur, Timurid 9, 86, 159–161, 178, 202, 205
Timurnama 159–161
Tirant lo Blanc 114–122, 132–133, 138, 140, 164–166, 182, 184
tournaments 110, 116–117, 164, 183, 186, 192
tradition *See* ideals of rulership
transmission *See* literature; *Thousand and one nights*
Tunis 118, 201, 228
Turkomans 151
Tyler, Margaret 20, 183–184
  The mirror of princely deeds and knighthood 20, 183–184

Uhud 122
'Umar al-Nu'man and his sons', the story of 9, 37, 109, 155
Urdu 20, 113, 121–122, 179

Vathek 106
Vedas 58, 216
Vetalapancavinsati 54
  See also The five-and-twenty tales of the genie
Vikramaditya 53–60, 70–71, 76, 88
virtues *See* ideals of rulership
viziers 19, 31, 34–37, 56, 78–79, 84, 88, 106, 123, 198, 208, 236
  advising rulers 26, 32–33, 37, 70, 106, 143
  corrupt 38, 84, 128, 132, 204, 208–209
  loyalty 198
  safeguarding stability 33, 36–37
  tasks, role 37, 88, 198, 204
  See also Ja'far al-Barmaki; ministers; Mustafa Ali; *The seven viziers*;
Voltaire 242
Voyage en Turquie et l'Égypte 100

Waiting for the dawn 211
Wales 119
Walpole, Horace 99
  Castle of Otranto, The 99
Wieland, Christoph Martin 20, 232–234, 237–238
Die Abderiten 233
  Don Sylvio de Ronsalva 233
  Dschinnistan 233
  Goldene Spiegel, Der 232–239
Wilhelm Meister novels 233
women
  emotionality of 26, 33, 49–50, 69, 71, 163–166, 221, 238
  in chivalric romances 112, 120
  in European literature 224–225
  in love romances 163–173, 196–197
  influencing rulers 26, 29–31, 34–36, 41–42, 47, 49–51, 71
  punishment of 26, 35, 42, 213
  See also chivalric romances; concubines; femininity; gender; harem; houris; love; love romances; misogyny; supernatural elements, *jinniya*; supernatural elements, nymphs; *Proclaiming harmony*; prostitution; *King Wu's expedition against the Zhou*; *The seven viziers*
Wu's expedition, expedition of *See King Wu's expedition against the Zhou*

Yamlikha 84–86, 158
  See also 'The queen of the serpents'
Yellow Emperor 88
yin/yang 46, 50, 133

yogi 55–58, 60, 169, 174, 177
Yue Fei 114, 133–141, 164
Yusuf and Zulaykha, the story of 27
Zaïde 190–196, 201
Zhenzong (Song emperor) 91–94
Zoroaster 86
Zubayda bint Ja'far 63